

THE STURGIS WAGER

A Detective Story

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BY
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TORONTO:
GEORGE N MORANG & COMPANY LIMITED
1899.

PS 3525
0633
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COMPANY, LIMITED, in the office of the Minister
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The Sturgis Wager.

CHAPTER I.

THE CABMAN'S FARE.

IT was bitterly cold. The keen December wind swept down the crowded thoroughfare, nipping the noses and ears of the gay pedestrians, comfortably muffled in their warm wraps.

Broadway was thronged with the usual holiday shoppers and pleasure-seekers. Cabs with their jaded steeds driven by weatherbeaten jehus, and private carriages behind well-groomed horses handled by liveried coachmen, deftly made their way through the crowds and deposited their fares at the entrances of the brightly lighted theaters or fashionable restaurants. A wizened hag, seated on the curbstone at the corner, seemed to shrink into herself with the cold as she turned the crank of her tiny barrel-organ and ground out a dismal and scarcely audible ca-

cophony; while an anxious-eyed newsboy, not yet in his teens, shivered on the opposite side of the way, as, with tremulous lips, he solicited a purchaser for his unsold stock. One could hardly be expected to open a warm overcoat on such a night, at the risk of taking cold, for the sake of throwing a cent to an old beggar woman, or of buying a newspaper from a ragged urchin. Even the gaily decorated shop windows failed to arrest the idle passersby; for it required perpetual motion to keep the blood in circulation.

The giant policeman on the crossing, representing the majesty of the law, swayed the crowd of vehicles and pedestrians with the authoritative gestures of his ponderous hands, and gallantly escorted bands of timid women through the inextricable moving maze.

And withal, the cable cars, with their discordant clangor, rumbled rapidly to and fro, like noisy shuttles, shooting the woof of the many-hued fabric which is the life of a great city.

Presently from one of the side streets there came a cab, which started leisurely to cross Broadway. The big policeman, with his eyes fixed upon an approaching car, held up a warning hand, to which the driver seemed to pay no at-

tention, for the reins remained slack and the listless horse continued to move slowly across the avenue.

Several people turned to look with mild curiosity at the bold cabman who dared thus to disregard the authority of blue cloth and brass buttons. Their surprise changed quickly to amazement and dismay when their eyes rested upon him; for his head had fallen forward upon his chest and his limp body swayed upon the box with every motion of the cab. He seemed unconscious of his surroundings, like one drunk or in a stupor.

At his side sat a young man closely muffled in his overcoat, and with a sealskin cap pulled well down over his ears. His face was deathly pale. Those who caught sight of his features saw that his bloodless lips were firmly set, and that his eyes glittered with a feverish light. He carried one hand in the lapel of his coat. With the other he shook the inert form of the unconscious cabman, in a vain effort to arouse him to a sense of the impending danger.

The situation flashed upon the gripman on the car. Instantly he threw his weight upon the brakewheel, at the same time loudly sounding

his gong. The policeman, too, understood in a twinkling what was about to happen, and rushed for the horse's head. But it was too late. The cab was fairly across the track when the car, with slackened speed, crashed into it.

Just before the collision, the young man in the sealskin cap sprang from the box to the street. He landed upon his feet ; but, losing his balance, he fell forward upon his left arm, which still remained in the lapel of his coat. He must have hurt himself ; for those standing near him heard him groan. But the center of interest was elsewhere, and no one paid much attention to the young man, who, arising quickly, disappeared in the crowd.

The cab, after tottering for an instant on two wheels, fell over upon its side, with a loud noise of splintering wood and breaking glass. The driver rolled off the box in a heap. At the same time, the panic-stricken passengers on the car rushed madly for the doors, fighting like wild beasts in their haste to reach a place of safety.

After the first frenzied moment, it became evident that, although badly shaken up, the passengers had received no injuries, except such bruises as they had inflicted upon each other in

their mad struggle to escape. By this time a crowd had collected about the overturned cab, and several more policemen had come to the assistance of the first one, who was now seated serenely upon the head of the cab-horse, a precaution seemingly superfluous, for the poor beast, though uninjured, appeared to be quite satisfied to rest where he lay until he should be forced once more to resume the grind of his unhappy existence.

The cabman had been rudely shaken by his fall. He had lain as though unconscious for the space of a few seconds; then, with assistance, he had managed to struggle to his feet. He stood now as though dazed by the shock, trying to understand what had happened.

"Are you hurt?" inquired one of the policemen.

The man, mumbling an unintelligible reply, raised his hand to a scalp wound from which the blood was flowing rather freely.

At that moment two men forced their way through the crowd which a circle of policemen had some difficulty in keeping at a distance from the wounded cabman. One was a middle-aged individual, who gave his name as Doctor Thurs-

ton and offered his services as a physician ; the other was a young man with keen gray eyes, who said nothing, but exhibited a reporter's badge.

The physician at once turned his attention to the cabman ; felt him, thumped him, pinched him ; smelt his breath ; and then delivered his verdict :

"No bones broken. The slight scalp wound doesn't amount to anything. The man has been drinking heavily. He is simply drunk."

The horse had by this time been unharnessed and the cab had been lifted upon its wheels again.

The reporter stood by a silent and apparently listless spectator of the scene.

Doctor Thurston turned to him :

"Come along, Sturgis ; neither you nor I are needed here ; and if we do not hurry, Sprague's dinner will have to wait for us. It is a quarter to eight now."

The reporter seemed about to follow his friend, but he stood for an instant irresolute.

"I say, Doctor," he inquired at last, "are you sure the man is drunk?"

"He has certainly been drinking heavily. Why?"

"Because it seems to me——Hello, we cannot go yet; the passenger is more badly hurt than the driver."

"The passenger?" queried the physician, turning in surprise to the policeman.

"What passenger?" asked the policeman, looking at the cabman. "Have you a passenger inside, young feller?"

"Naw," replied the cabman, who seemed to be partially sobered by the shock and loss of blood. "Naw, I aint got no fare, barrin' the man wot was on the box."

The reporter observed the man closely as he spoke; and then, pointing to the step of the cab, which was plainly visible in the glare of a neighboring electric lamp:

"I mean the passenger whose blood is trickling there," he said quietly.

Every eye was turned in the direction of his outstretched hand.

A few drops of a thick dark liquid had oozed from under the door, and was dripping upon the iron step. The cab door was closed and the curtain was drawn down over the sash, the glass of which had been shattered by the fall.

One of the policemen tried to open the door.

It stuck in the jamb. Then he exerted upon it the whole of his brute strength; and, of a sudden, it yielded. As it flew open, the body of a man lurched from the inside of the cab, and before any one could catch it, tumbled in a heap upon the pavement.

A low cry of horror escaped from the crowd.

The cabman's passenger was a man past middle age, neatly but plainly dressed.

As Doctor Thurston and a policeman bent over the prostrate form, the reporter shot a keen glance in the direction of the cabman, who stood staring at the body with a look of ghastly terror in his bulging eyes.

Presently the physician started to his feet with a low exclamation of surprise.

"Is he dead, Doctor?" asked the policeman.

"He has been dead for some time," replied the physician, impressively; "the body is almost cold."

"Been dead for some time?" echoed the policeman.

"Yes; this man was shot. See there!"

As he spoke, he pointed to a red streak which, starting from the left side of the dead man's coat, extended downward and marked the course

of the tiny stream in which the life blood had flowed to a little pool on the floor of the cab.

"Shot!" exclaimed the policeman, who turned immediately to one of his brother officers. "Keep your eye on the cabman, Jim. We'll have to take him in. And look out for the other man, quick!"

Then, addressing the cabman, upon each of whose shoulders a policeman's hand was immediately placed, he asked roughly:

"Who is this man?"

The cabman was completely sober now. He stood, pale and trembling, between his two captors, as he replied solemnly:

"Before God, I don't know, boss. I never saw him before."

The policeman looked at the man in blank amazement for an instant. Then he turned away contemptuously:

"All right, young feller," he said, "you don't have to confess to me. But I guess you'll have a chance to tell that story to a judge and jury."

Then he proceeded to examine the dead man's pockets. They were empty.

"Looks like robbery," he murmured. "What is it, Jim? Haven't you got the other man?"

Jim had not found the other man ; for the pale young fellow in the sealskin cap had disappeared.

The reporter was stooping over the body, while Doctor Thurston cut through the clothing and laid bare a small round wound.

"Here is another bullet wound," said Sturgis, turning over the body slightly, and pointing out a second round hole in the back of the dead man.

He seemed to take great interest in this discovery. He whipped out a steel tape and rapidly but carefully took a number of measurements, as if to locate the positions of the two wounds. Then he stepped into the cab ; and, striking match after match, he spent several minutes apparently in eager search for something which he could not find.

"That is strange," he muttered to himself, as he came out at last.

"What is it ?" inquired Thurston, who alone had caught the words.

But the reporter either did not hear or did not care to answer. He at once renewed his search on the brilliantly lighted pavement in the immediate vicinity of the cab ; examining every

stone, investigating every joint and every rut, prodding with his cane every lump of frozen mud, turning every stray scrap of paper.

"Well, Doctor," he said, when at length he rejoined his companion, "if you have done all that you can we may as well go. It is one of the prettiest problems I have met; but there is nothing more for me to learn here for the present. By the way, as I was saying when I interrupted myself a little while ago; are you sure the cabman is drunk? I wish you would take another good look at him. The question may be more important than it seemed at first."

A few minutes later, the physician and the reporter were hurrying along to make up for the time they had lost; the cab and the cabman had disappeared in the custody of the police, and the cabman's grewsome fare was jolting through Twenty-sixth Street, in the direction of a small building which stands near the East River, and in which the stranded waifs of the new-world metropolis can find rest at last, upon a stone slab, in the beginning of their eternal sleep.

Broadway had resumed its holiday aspect; the wizened hag at the corner still patiently

ground out her plaintive discords; the tearful newsboy, with his slowly diminishing armful of newspapers, continued to shiver in the cold wind, as he offered his stock to the hurrying pedestrians; the big policeman again piloted his fair charges through the mass of moving vehicles, and the clanging cable cars started once more on their rumbling course, as if the snapping of a thread in the fabric of the city's life were a thing of constant occurrence and of no moment.

A few tiny dark red stains upon the pavement were all that remained to tell the story of the scene which had so recently been enacted in the busy thoroughfare. Presently even these were obliterated by the random stroke of a horse's hoof.

The ripple had disappeared from the surface. The stream of life was flowing steadily once more through the arteries of the metropolis.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAGER.

"WHAT I mean to assert," said Ralph Sturgis, with quiet conviction, "is that every crime is its own historian ; that all its minutest details are written in circumstantial evidence as completely as an eye-witness could see them,—aye, more fully and more truly than they could be described by the criminal himself."

The reporter was a man of about thirty, whose regular features bore the unmistakable stamp of intelligence and refinement. In repose, they wore an habitual expression of introspective concentration, which might have led a careless observer to class Ralph Sturgis in the category of aimless dreamers. But a single flash of the piercing gray eyes generally sufficed to dispel any such impression ; and told of keen perception and underlying power. The mouth was firm and kind ; the bearing that of a gentleman and a man of education.

"But," objected the host, "you surely do not mean to express a belief in the infallibility of circumstantial evidence?"

"Why not?"

"Because you must know as well as any one how misleading uncorroborated circumstantial evidence is. I do not forget what remarkable results you have often accomplished for the *Daily Tempest* in detecting and following up clues to which the official detectives were blind. But, frankly, were not your conclusions usually the result of lucky guesses, which would have remained comparatively useless as evidence had they not been subsequently proved correct by direct testimony?"

"Let me reply to your question by another, Sprague," answered Sturgis. "When you draw a check, does the paying teller at the bank require the testimony of witnesses to your signature before admitting its genuineness?"

"No; of course not."

"Precisely. He probably knows the signature of Harvey M. Sprague, the depositor, better than he does the face of Sprague, the artist. And yet the evidence here is purely circumstantial. I know of at least one recent instance in which the

officials of a New York bank placed their implicit reliance upon circumstantial evidence of this sort, in spite of the direct testimony of the depositor, who was willing to acknowledge the genuineness of a check to which his name had been forged."

"I suppose you refer to the Forsyth case," said Sprague; "but you must remember that Colonel Forsyth was actuated by the desire to shield the forger, who was his own scapegrace son."

"That is just the point," replied Sturgis; "another witness will be biased by his interests or prejudices, blinded by jealousy, love or hatred, or handicapped by overzealousness, stupidity, lack of memory, or what not. Circumstantial evidence is always impartial, truthful, absolute. When the geologist reads the history of the earth, as it is written in its crust; when a Kepler or a Newton formulates the immutable laws of the universe, as they are recorded in the motions of the heavenly bodies, they draw their conclusions from evidence which is entirely circumstantial."

"Yes; but you forget that science has often been mistaken in its conclusions," interrupted Sprague, "so that it has constantly been neces-

sary to alter theories to fit newly acquired or better understood facts."

"Granted," rejoined Sturgis, "but that is because the interpreters of the evidence are fallible; not because the evidence itself is incomplete. The same cause will always produce the same effect; the same chain of events will invariably terminate in one and the same catastrophe. The apparent deviations from this law are due to unrecognized differences in the producing causes, to additional or missing links in the chain of evidence. Therefore I hold that a criminal, however clever he may be, leaves behind him a complete trace of his every act, from which his crime may be reconstructed with absolute certainty by a competent detective."

"In short, 'Murder will out!'" said a man who had been a silent listener to the conversation up to this point. He spoke with a quiet smile, which barely escaped being a polite sneer.

Sturgis's keen eyes met his interlocutor's as he replied gravely:

"I should hardly care to make so sweeping an affirmation, Doctor Murdock. I have merely stated that the history of every crime is indelibly

written in tangible evidence. The writing is on the wall, but of course a blind man cannot see it, nor can an illiterate man understand it. Every event, however trivial, owes its occurrence to a natural cause, and leaves its indelible impress upon nature. The Indian on the trail reads with an experienced eye the story of his enemy's passage, as it has been recorded in trodden turf and broken twigs; while the bloodhound follows, with unerring judgment, a still surer though less tangible trail. The latter's quarry has left behind, at every step, an invisible, imponderable, and yet unmistakable part of itself. Perhaps my meaning can be made clear by an illustration. When a photographer in his dark room takes an exposed plate from his camera, it is apparently a blank; but in reality there is upon this plate the minutely detailed history of an event, which, in proper hands, can be brought before the least competent of observers as irrefutable evidence. Here, the actinic rays of the sunlight are the authors of the evidence; but every natural force, in one way or another, conspires with the detective to run the criminal to earth."

"Unless," suggested Murdock, "the ability happens to be on the side of the quarry; in

which case, the conspiracy of Nature's forces turns against the hunter."

"Ah!" retorted the reporter, "the game is not an equal one. The dice are loaded. For while on the one hand, the detective, if he falls into an error, has a lifetime in which to correct it, any misstep on the part of the criminal is fatal. And who is infallible?"

"Not the detective, at any rate," answered Murdock with suave irony. "It has always seemed to me that the halo which has been conferred upon him, chiefly through the efforts of imaginative writers of sensational fiction, is entirely undeserved. In the first place, most of the crimes of which we hear are committed either by men of a low order of intelligence or else by madmen, in which latter category I include all criminals acting under the impulse of any of the passions—hatred, love, jealousy, anger. And then, while the detective takes good care that his successes shall be proclaimed from the house-tops, he is equally careful to smother all accounts, or to suppress every detail, of his failures, whenever there is any possibility of so doing. You can cite, I know, plenty of cases in which, even after the lapse of years, the crime

has been discovered and the criminal has been confronted with his guilt, but——"

"In my opinion," piped the shrill voice of an elderly man of clerical aspect, "conscience is the surest detective, after all."

"Conscience!" retorted Murdock calmly; "the word is a euphemism. Man gives the name of conscience to his fear of discovery and punishment. There is no such thing as conscience in the criminal who has absolute confidence in his power to escape detection."

"But where is the man who can have that superb confidence in himself?" asked Sprague.

"His name is probably legion," answered Murdock quickly. "He is the author of every crime whose history remains forever unwritten."

"And are these really so numerous?"

"Let us see how the case stands in one single class of crime—say, for instance, murder. Whenever the solution of a sensational murder mystery is effected by the detectives, or by their allies, the gentlemen of the press, like our friend Mr. Sturgis, we, the gullible public, vociferously applaud the achievements of these guardians of the public safety, and forthwith proceed to award them a niche in the temple of Fame. So far, so

good. But what of the dark mysteries which remain forever unsolved? What of the numerous crimes of which no one ever even knows?"

"Oh! come now, Doctor," laughed Sprague, "isn't it rather paradoxical to base your argument on the assumption of crimes of whose very existence you admit you have no knowledge?"

Murdock smiled grimly as he replied:

"Go to the morgue of any large city, where the unrecognized dead are exposed for identification. Aside from the morbid crowd which is drawn to such a place by uncanny curiosity, you will find that each corpse is anxiously scanned by numbers of people, each of whom is seeking a missing friend or relative. At the most, each body can furnish the key to only one mystery. Then what of the scores, ay, the hundreds of others?"

After a short pause, he continued:

"No; murder will not out—at least not when the criminal is what I might call a professional, a man of genius in his vocation, educated, intelligent, dispassionate, scientific. Fortunately for the reputation of the detective, amateur and professional, the genius in the criminal line is necessarily of a modest and retiring disposition.

He cannot call the public attention to his ingenuity and skill ; *he* cannot puff his achievements in the daily press. Not only are his masterpieces unsigned, but they remain forever unheard of. The detective is known only by his successes ; the criminal's reputation is based solely upon his failures."

Doctor Murdock delivered this parting shot with the cool deliberateness which was characteristic of the man. The insolent irony of his words was emphasized by the calmness of his bearing.

"I say, Doctor," laughed Sprague, "you have missed your vocation. You should have adopted the profession of scientific criminal yourself. You seem to possess the theory of the science as it is, and a little experience would no doubt have made you an adept in the practice as well."

A look of mild amusement passed over Murdock's countenance.

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Sprague. At any rate, I think I may affirm, without overweening conceit, that if I had followed the course you suggest, I could have prepared for your friend Mr. Sturgis some pretty little problems on which to sharpen his wits. I feel that I could have been an artist as well as a scientist in that line."

"You might console yourself by writing an interesting and valuable book, under some such title as 'Hints to the Young Criminal,' or 'Crime as a Fine Art.' At all events, your criminals of genius have a staunch advocate in you. But what on earth have the detectives done to you to call forth this wholesale vituperation?"

"Nothing. But, as a disinterested observer, I like to see fair play. If I am mistaken in my estimate of the modern detective, I am open to conviction. I have five thousand dollars to wager against one hundred that I can pick up any daily paper and from its columns select an unsolved riddle, to which no detective on the face of the earth can give the answer. Have I any taker, gentlemen?"

As he spoke, his eyes met Sturgis's and suddenly seemed to flash with an earnest defiance, which instantly melted into the calm, cynical smile of the man of the world.

"Done," said Sturgis, quietly.

"Very well, Mr. Sturgis," observed Doctor Murdock indifferently. "I shall confine myself to the columns of your own newspaper for the selection of the problem upon which you are to work.

"And," he added, with a supercilious smile, "you are at liberty to fix the limit of time in which the wager must be decided."

"Hear! hear!" exclaimed a young broker. "This is becoming interesting, and promises some sport for those of us who are giddy enough to enjoy staking something on this novel contest. I, for one, am willing to lay reasonable odds on the side of law and order, as represented by the enlightened press, in the person of our clever friend Sturgis. Come, Chadwick, will two to one against the scientific criminal tempt you to champion the cause of that apparently unappreciated individual?"

"Very well, Fred," answered the man, addressed; "I'll take you for a hundred."

A few similar bets were laughingly arranged, and a copy of the *Evening Tempest* was sent for.

CHAPTER III.

DOCTOR MURDOCK'S PROBLEM.

SPRAGUE'S stag dinner was virtually over when a servant brought in a copy of the *Evening Tempest*. The dessert had been removed, the coffee and liqueurs had been served, and the guests had lighted their cigars. The host passed the newspaper to Doctor Murdock, who proceeded to glance leisurely through its columns.

"Ah! this will do," he exclaimed, at last. "Here is something which will, I think, answer our purpose—

"MYSTERIOUS SHOTS IN WALL STREET.

WHO FIRED THEM?

STORY OF A STRAY SATCHEL.

THE POLICE PUZZLED.

"While on his beat, at a quarter past five o'clock this afternoon, Policeman John Flynn,

hearing the report of a pistol from the direction of the Knickerbocker bank——”

“The Knickerbocker bank!” interrupted the young broker. “Mr. Dunlap, that interests you. Do your directors indulge in pistol practice at the board meetings?”

“What is that about the Knickerbocker bank?” asked the man to whom this speech was addressed. Having been engaged with his neighbor in an earnest discussion on financial questions, he had not been listening to the general conversation.

Murdock adjusted his eyeglasses, and quietly resumed:

“Policeman John Flynn, hearing the report of a pistol from the direction of the Knickerbocker bank, in Wall Street, started at the top of his speed toward that building. When he was within about twenty yards of the bank another shot rang out, and at the same instant a man darted down the steps and ran toward Broadway.”

Richard Dunlap, president of the Knickerbocker bank, was listening attentively enough now. Behind the calm mask of the financier there was the evident anxiety of the bank president. For the stability of a bank, like the honor

of a woman, is at the mercy of every passing rumor.

"He carried in his hand a small satchel, which he dropped as soon as he saw that he was pursued. After an exciting chase, Flynn overtook his man, whom he recognized as Michael Quinlan, *alias* Shorty Duff, a well-known sneak thief. On the way back to the bank the policeman questioned his prisoner about the pistol shots. Quinlan vehemently denied having fired them; but admitted that he had stolen the satchel. His story is that, as he was passing the bank, the outer door was ajar. Seeing the satchel in the vestibule, he entered, crouching low in order to avoid being seen through the inner door, the upper portion of which is of plate glass. Scarcely had he laid his hand upon the satchel when he was startled by the report of a pistol. For a moment he was dazed and undecided how to act. Then, as no one seemed to take any notice of his presence, he was quietly slipping off, when a second shot was fired. Panic-stricken, he took to his heels, only to be captured by Flynn.

"On reaching the bank Flynn found the outer door closed but not fastened. The heavy iron gate between it and the inner door was securely locked, however, so that it was impossible to enter. The Knickerbocker bank has a second entrance on Exchange Place. But this, too, is

protected by a massive iron gate, which also was found locked. Flynn rapped for assistance, and the call having been answered by Policemen Kirkpatrick and O'Donnell, he left the former to watch the Exchange Place door, and the latter to guard the entrance on Wall Street, while he took his prisoner to the police station.

"Messengers were at once despatched to the house of Mr. Richard Dunlap, the president of the bank, and to that of Mr. George S. Rutherford, the cashier. The former was not at home, and the family being out of town, there was no one who knew where he was spending the evening."

Every eye turned toward Richard Dunlap as this paragraph was read. His features remained impassive, under the full control of the veteran financier; but to an observant eye like Sturgis's, the man's real anxiety was betrayed by the unconscious action of his right hand, which lay upon the table and played nervously with a fork.

"Yes," said the banker, carelessly, feeling the curious gaze of the other guests upon him, and answering their unspoken questions, "yes, that is true; I did not tell my housekeeper that I was invited to dine by our friend Sprague this evening. There was, of course, no reason why I

should. Well, Doctor Murdock, did they find Rutherford?"

Murdock had looked up while the banker was speaking. He now leisurely found his place and continued the reading of the article in the *Tempest*:

"The cashier fortunately was at home, and he hurried down town at once with his set of the bank keys. Two detectives from the Central Office accompanied him, and the three men carefully searched the premises. They found nothing out of the way there, except that three gas jets were lighted and turned on full blaze. At first the detectives were inclined to think that bank robbers had gained an entrance to the building; and that one of them, having caught sight of Shorty Duff as he reached in to steal the satchel from the vestibule, had fired upon him. This would explain the pistol shots heard by Flynn. A careful examination of the bank, however, failed to reveal any trace of a bullet.

"The valise, when opened, proved to contain only a change of linen for a man and a few toilet articles of but slight intrinsic value. The satchel itself is an ordinary cheap leather handbag, stamped in imitation of alligator skin.

"The police are now looking for its owner in the hope that he will be able to throw some light on the mystery of the pistol shots."

DOCTOR MURDOCK'S PROBLEM. 29

When Doctor Murdock had finished reading, everybody, except Dunlap and Sturgis, looked disappointed. The former settled back in his chair, the muscles of his face relaxed, and the anxious bank president once more became the genial and polished man of the world. The reporter sat gazing thoughtfully at his wineglass.

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said Murdock, "what do you think of my little problem?"

"I have already been assigned to work up this case for the *Tempest*," answered the reporter quietly.

"Indeed? Perhaps you are the author of this very article? No? Then are you willing to make the solution of this little mystery the subject of our wager and the test of your theories?"

"Hold on, Doctor," exclaimed Sprague; "you are doing Sturgis an injustice. Why pick out, as a test of his ability, a problem which, to all intents and purposes, has already been solved by the police? Give him some truly knotty question and he will be in his element; and then, at least, some interest will attach to your wager."

"Ah! you think the problem has already been solved?"

"To be sure. The article you have read us started out as if it were going to prove interesting; but, instead of that, it ends in an anticlimax. What is the crime here? The confessed theft, by a petty sneak thief, of a satchel worth, with its contents, perhaps eight or ten dollars. And where is the mystery? The ownership of a few pieces of unmarked linen of so little value that the owner does not care to take the trouble to claim them."

"I cannot agree with you, Mr. Sprague. While the crime in this case may be a petty theft, it contains, to my mind, interesting features, which you appear to lose sight of in your disdainful summary. The problem, it seems to me, involves a suitable explanation of two rather mysterious pistol shots, to say nothing of such minor details as lighted gas jets behind securely locked gates. As Mr. Sturgis has informed us, in his earnest and lucid way, every effect has a cause. I should like to know the cause that lighted the gas in the Knickerbocker bank."

"I shall probably find out that cause the day after to-morrow," said Mr. Dunlap smiling, "and I shall give the fellow a talking to for his

carelessness in forgetting to turn out the gas when he locked up."

"Mr. Dunlap's suggestion," continued Murdock, "is plausible in itself, and we might even assume that the same careless employé, after locking up the bank, forgot to close the outer door on the Wall Street side. But even then, we have not disposed of the ownership of the satchel nor of the two pistol shots. The police theory that these shots were fired by bank robbers seems, I admit, very far-fetched. Professional cracksmen would hardly be likely to fire, unless cornered; and then they would fire to kill, or at least to disable. If their bullets failed to hit the mark, they would at any rate leave some trace."

"I beg to suggest," remarked Dunlap, "that the shots heard by the policeman and his prisoner were not fired from the inside of the bank."

"That appears quite likely," admitted Murdock; "but they must at any rate have been fired in close proximity to the bank, since the witnesses agree that they appeared to come from inside. In that case, whence were they fired? By whom? And why? On the whole, my little puzzle does not seem to me so ill

chosen. What is your own opinion, Mr. Sturgis?"

"I quite agree with you that the problem is probably not so simple as it seemed at first blush to Sprague."

"Very well. Then doubtless you are willing to undertake the task of supplying whatever data may be required to complete the chain of evidence against Quinlan?"

"By no means," replied Sturgis decidedly.

"Indeed? Ah! well, of course, if Mr. Sturgis wishes to withdraw his bet——"

"I do not wish to withdraw my bet," said Sturgis; "I will agree to solve your problem within thirty days or to forfeit my stakes; but I cannot undertake to prove the truth or falsity of any *a priori* theory. I have no personal knowledge of the matter as yet, and therefore no theory."

"Quite so," observed Murdock ironically. "I had forgotten your scientific methods. Of course, it may turn out that it was the policeman who stole the satchel from Shorty Duff."

"Perhaps," answered Sturgis, imperturbably.

Murdock smiled.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "I accept Mr.

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Sturgis's conditions. If you are willing," he continued, turning to the reporter, "our host will hold the stakes and decide the wager."

"I, for one, agree with Sprague," said Doctor Thurston. "I am disappointed in the problem. I have seen Sturgis unravel some extremely puzzling tangles in my day; and such a case would not be hard to find. Why, no longer ago than this evening, on our way here, we stumbled upon a most peculiar case——eh?——oh!——er——please pass the cognac, Sprague. I wish I had some like it in my cellar; it is worth its weight in gold."

Doctor Thurston had met Sturgis's steady gaze and had understood that, for some reason or other, the reporter did not wish him to relate their adventure of the afternoon.

Only one person appeared to notice the abrupt termination of his story. This was Murdock, who had looked up at the speaker with mild curiosity, and who had also intercepted the reporter's warning glance at his friend. He observed Doctor Thurston narrowly for a full minute, appeared to enjoy his clumsy effort to cover his retreat, and then quietly sipped his coffee.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BANK PRESIDENT.

SPRAGUE'S dinner party was over, and among the first to take their leave, shortly after midnight, were Dunlap, Sturgis and Doctor Thurston.

The reporter did not often spend an evening in worldly dissipation. He was a man of action, a hard worker and an enthusiastic student. Almost all of the time which was not actually spent in the pursuit of his profession, was devoted to study in many widely different fields of art and science. For Sturgis's ideal of his profession was high; he held that almost every form of knowledge was essential to success in his line of work. It was seldom, therefore, that he allowed himself to spend a precious evening in social intercourse, unless as a more or less direct means to some end. He had made an exception in favor of Sprague's dinner, and his meeting with Dunlap, whom he had not previously known, had been entirely accidental.

Dunlap was, however, a man whom Sturgis

needed to see in the course of his study of the Knickerbocker bank mystery, and he had not lost the opportunity which chance had placed in his way. After obtaining an introduction to the bank president, the reporter had sought an occasion to speak with him in private; and, as this did not present itself during the course of the evening, he had timed his departure so that it should coincide with that of Dunlap. Doctor Thurston had followed his friend's lead.

"Are you going down to the bank this evening, Mr. Dunlap?" asked Sturgis, as the trio faced the bleak wind.

"I? No. Why should I?" inquired the banker in apparent surprise.

"I see no particular reason why you should," replied the reporter. "If to-day were a banking day, there would be no time to lose. But since it is New Year's day, there is little, if any, chance of the trail being disturbed; and it will be much easier to find it in broad daylight than by gaslight. Our friends of the Central Office are usually pretty clever in discovering at least the more evident clues in a case of this sort, even when they have not the ability to correctly interpret them. And since they have

completely failed in their search to-night, we must anticipate a more than ordinarily difficult puzzle."

"Why, Mr. Sturgis," said Dunlap somewhat anxiously. "You talk as though you really believed that some mysterious crime has been committed at the bank."

"I do not know enough about the case as yet to advance any positive belief in the matter," said Sturgis; "but if we assume as correct the circumstances related in the article which Doctor Murdock read to us this evening, they certainly present an extraordinary aspect."

Dunlap reflected for an instant.

"Still, the fact that our cashier found everything in good order at the bank is in itself completely reassuring," he said musingly.

"Very likely," assented Sturgis. "It is quite possible that from a banker's point of view the problem is wholly devoid of interest; but from a detective's standpoint it appears to be full of promising features. Therefore, whether or not you intend to look farther into the matter yourself, I beg you will at least authorize me to make a survey of the field by daylight in the morning."

Dunlap looked anything but pleased as the reporter spoke these words. He thought before replying.

"Frankly, Mr. Sturgis," he said at length with studied courtesy, "I will not conceal the fact that what you ask places me in a rather awkward position. You are a friend of my friend Sprague, and my personal intercourse with you this evening has been pleasant enough to make me hope that, in the future, I may be so fortunate as to include you in my own circle of acquaintances. Therefore, on personal grounds, it would give me great pleasure to grant your request. But, on the other hand, you are a journalist and I am a banker; and it is with banks as with nations—happy that which has no history. Capital is proverbially timid, you know."

"I see," said Sturgis; "you fear that the reputation of the Knickerbocker bank may suffer if the mystery of the pistol shots is solved."

"No, no, my dear sir; not at all, not at all. You quite misunderstand me," replied the banker, with just a shade of warmth. "It is not a question of the bank's credit exactly, since there has been neither robbery nor defalcation; but depositors do not like to see the name of their bank mentioned

in the newspapers ; they take fright at once. Depositors are most unreasonable beings, Mr. Sturgis ; they are liable to become panic-stricken on the most insignificant provocation ; and then they run amuck like mad sheep. The Knickerbocker bank does not fear any run that might ever be made upon it. Its credit stands on too secure a foundation for that. But nevertheless a run on a bank is expensive, Mr. Sturgis, very expensive."

"The bank's affairs being in so satisfactory a condition," observed the reporter, "it seems to me that whatever harm publicity is likely to do has already been done. The imaginations of your depositors are now at work sapping the foundation of the Knickerbocker bank. If the truth cannot injure its credit, it can only strengthen it ; and to withhold the truth under the circumstances, is to invite suspicion."

Dunlap did not appear to like the turn the conversation was taking. He walked along in silence for a few minutes, irresolute. At length he seemed to make up his mind.

"Perhaps you are right after all, Mr. Sturgis. At any rate we have nothing to conceal from the public. If you will be at the bank to-morrow

morning at nine o'clock, I shall be pleased to meet you there."

Sturgis nodded his acquiescence.

"Well, gentlemen, here is my street," continued the banker. "Good evening, good evening."

And he was off.

"Whither are you bound now, Thurston?" asked the reporter, as the two friends resumed their walk.

"Home and to bed like a sensible fellow," replied the physician.

"Don't you do anything of the sort. Come along with me to my rooms. I must arrange the data so far collected in the two interesting cases that I have taken up to-day; and in the cab mystery, at least, you can probably be of assistance to me, if you will."

"Very well, old man; lead on. I am curious to know what theories you have adopted in these two cases."

"Theories!" replied Sturgis; "I never adopt theories. I simply ascertain facts and arrange them in their proper sequence, as far as possible. When this arrangement is successfully accomplished, the history of the crime is practically

completed. Detection of crime is an exact science. Here, as in all other sciences, the imagination has an important part to play, but that part consists only in co-ordinating and interpreting facts. The solid foundation of facts must invariably come first."

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CHAPTER V.

A FOUNDATION OF FACTS.

WHEN the two men were comfortably settled in the reporter's study, Sturgis produced pipes, tobacco and writing materials.

"There now," said he, as he prepared to write, "I shall begin with what I shall call the Cab Mystery. The data in this case are already plentiful and curious. I shall read as I write, and you can interrupt for suggestions and criticisms, as the points occur to you. In the first place, then, the dead man is about fifty years old, and was employed in some commercial house or financial institution, probably as bookkeeper, at a fairly good salary."

"Hold on there, Sturgis," laughed Thurston. "I thought you were going to build up a solid foundation of facts before you allowed your imagination to run riot!"

"Well?" inquired the reporter in apparent surprise.

"Well, the only fact you have mentioned is the approximate age of the dead man. The rest is pure assumption. How can you know anything certain about his occupation and the amount of his salary?"

"True; I forgot you had not followed the steps in the process of induction. Here they are: the dead man's sleeves, on the under side below the elbow, were worn shiny. This shows that his occupation is at a desk of some kind."

"Or behind a counter," suggested Thurston quizzically.

"No. Your hypothesis is untenable. A clerk behind a counter does occasionally, it is true, lean upon his forearms. But incessant contact with the counter leaves across the front of his trousers an unmistakable line of wear, at a level varying according to the height of the individual. This line was not present in the case of the man in the cab. On the other hand, his waistcoat is frayed and worn at the level of the fourth button from the top. Therefore I maintain that he was in the habit of working at a desk. Now the trousers, although not new, are not baggy at the knees, though free from the seams which would suggest the effect of pressing or of a trousers

stretcher. Conclusion, the desk is a high one ; for the man stood at his work. Most men who work standing at high desks are bookkeepers of one kind or another. Therefore, as I said before, this man was probably a bookkeeper. Now, as to his salary ; I do not pretend to know the exact amount of it, of course. But when a man, who was evidently not a dude, has his clothes made to order, of imported material, and when his linen, his hat and his shoes are of good quality, it is fair to infer that the man's income was comfortable.

"I proceed with the arrangement of my data :

"Secondly: the man in the cab died of a wound caused by a bullet fired at very close quarters. Indeed, the weapon must have been held either against the victim's body, or, at any rate, very near to it ; for the coat is badly burned by the powder."

"On these points at least," assented Doctor Thurston, "I can agree with you. The bullet probably penetrated the upper lobe of the left lung."

"Yes," added Sturgis, "and it passed out at the back, far below where it went in."

"What makes you think it passed out? The

wound in the back may have been caused by another bullet fired from the rear."

"That hypothesis might be tenable, were it not for this."

With these words, the reporter pulled out his watch, opened the case, and with the blade of a penknife took from the surface of the crystal a minute object, which he handed to the physician.

"Look at it," said he, pushing over a magnifying glass.

Doctor Thurston examined the tiny object carefully.

"A splinter of bone," he said at last.

"Yes. I found it on the surface of the wound in the back. How did it get there?"

"You are right," admitted the physician; "it must have come from within, chipped from a rib and carried out by the bullet which entered from the front."

"I think there can be no doubt as to that. Now, the bullet does not seem to have been deflected in its course by its contact with the rib, for, as far as I have been able to judge by probing the two wounds with my pencil, their direction is the same. This is important and brings me

to point three, which is illustrated by these diagrams, drawn to scale from the measurements I took this afternoon."

As he said these words, the reporter handed his friend a sheet of paper upon which he had drawn some geometrical figures.

"The first of these diagrams shows the angle which the course of the bullet made with a horizontal plane; the second represents the inclination from right to left. The former of these angles is nearly sixty, and the latter not far from forty-five degrees. The inclination from right to left shows that the shot was fired from the right side of the dead man. Now then, one of two things: Either it was fired by the man himself, the weapon being held in his right hand; or else it was fired by an assassin who stood close to the victim's right side. The first of these hypotheses, considered by itself, is admissible; but it involves the assumption of an extremely awkward and unusual position of the suicide's hand while firing. On the other hand, the dead man is tall—six feet one inch—and to fire down, at an angle of sixty degrees, upon a man of his height, his assailant would have to be a colossus, or else to stand upon a chair or in some other equally ele-

vated position, unless the victim happened to be seated when the shot was fired."

"Happened to be seated!" exclaimed Thurston astounded, "why, of course he was seated, since he was in the cab."

"That brings up point four, which is not the least puzzling of this interesting case," said Sturgis impressively; "the shooting was not done in the cab."

"Not done in the cab!"

"No; otherwise the bullet would have remained in the cushions; and it was not there."

"It might have fallen out into the street at the time of the collision," suggested Thurston.

"No; I searched every inch of the space in which it might have fallen. If it had been there I should have found it, for the spot was brilliantly lighted by an electric light, as you remember."

The physician pondered in silence for a few minutes.

"With all due respect for the accuracy of your observations, and for the rigorous logic of your inductions, Sturgis," he asserted at last with decision, "I am positive that the man died seated, for his limbs stiffened in that position."

"Yes," assented Sturgis, "and, for that mat-

ter, I grant you that he breathed his last in the cab ; for in his death struggles he clutched in his left hand the curtain of the cab window, a piece of which remained in his dying grasp. I merely said that he was not shot in the cab."

"Then how did he get there?" asked the physician.

"Your question is premature, my dear fellow," replied Sturgis, smiling; "it must remain unanswered for the present. All we have established as yet is that he did get there. And that being the case, he must have been assisted; for, wounded as he was, he could not, I take it, have climbed into the cab by himself."

"Certainly not," agreed Thurston.

"Point five," resumed Sturgis, "the right arm was broken just above the wrist."

"Yes," said the physician, "I thought at first that the arm might have been broken in the collision with the cable car; but the discoloration of the flesh proves conclusively that the fracture occurred before death."

"Precisely. Now, it is possible that the man broke his arm when he fell, after being shot; but the contused wound looks to me as if it had been made by a severe blow with some blunt instrument."

"Possibly," admitted Thurston.

"This broken arm, if we can place it in its proper chronological position, may prove to be of some importance in the chain of evidence," mused Sturgis. "If the fracture occurred before the man was shot, that, of course, excludes the possibility of suicide; but, on the other hand, it also brings in an obstacle to the hypothesis of murder."

"How so?"

"Because we have settled, you will remember, that the shot was fired from the right of the victim, and close to him. Now, if he did not fire the shot himself, the person who did must have reached over his right arm to do so. In that case, unless the victim was asleep or stupefied, would he not instinctively have raised his arm in self-defence, and thus deflected the weapon upward?"

"Evidently."

"Well, it is idle to speculate on this line for the present. Let us come to point six. You remember I called your particular attention to the cabman. Do you still think he was only drunk?"

"No," replied Thurston; "while he had un-

questionably been drinking heavily, he also showed symptoms of narcotic poisoning."

"Then the presumption is that he had been drugged by those who wished to place the wounded man in his cab. I observed him closely and I am satisfied that he knows as little about his dead passenger as we do. He probably knows less about him, at all events, than the young man in the sealskin cap who gave the police the slip during the excitement which followed the overturning of the cab."

Sturgis paused a moment.

"This, I think," he continued, "covers all the evidence we have thus far collected in the Cab Mystery. It is quite satisfactory, as far as it goes, for it is circumstantial evidence, and, therefore, absolutely truthful. In the Knickerbocker Bank Mystery, we have as yet no satisfactory data whatever; for everything we have heard concerning it has its origin in the fallible evidence of witnesses, and has, moreover, reached us third or fourth hand. There is, however, one fact that may, or may not, prove to be important. Have you noticed that these two mysteries are contemporaneous, and, therefore, that they may be related?"

"Do you think there is any connection between the two?" inquired Thurston, interested.

"I do not allow myself to think about it at all as yet," replied Sturgis; "I simply note the fact, that, so far as time is concerned, the Cab Mystery could be the sequel to the Knickerbocker Bank Mystery—that is all. Facts, my dear boy, are like words. A word is only an assemblage of meaningless letters until it becomes pregnant with sense by context. So, a fact, which, standing by itself, has no meaning, may, when correlated with other facts, become fraught with deep significance."

"And now," he continued, after a pause, "I think our work is concluded for the present. I shall be able to lay it aside for the night. Let me offer you a glass of sherry. Pleasant evening we spent at Sprague's to-night. I have a great admiration for him as an artist, and a great fondness for him as a man. Most of his friends are strangers to me, though. You know I have very little time to indulge in social dissipation. By the way, who is that Doctor Murdock with whom I have made this bet?"

"Oh! he is a physician, though now retired from practice. He devotes himself entirely to

scientific research, especially in the domain of chemistry. He has made some important discoveries in organic chemistry, and they say he has succeeded in proving some of the supposed elementary metals to be compounds. He has quite an enviable reputation in the scientific world. I understand he is a remarkable man."

"That is evident at a glance. He showed himself this evening to be a clear thinker and a brilliant speaker. I should say he was something of a genius, and I should judge, moreover, that he was a man of magnificent nerve, capable of the most heroic actions, or——"

Sturgis hesitated.

"Or——?" asked Thurston.

"Or of the most infamous cruelty and crime. It all depends upon whether or not his great mental attributes are under the control of a heart; a point upon which I am somewhat in doubt."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARTIST.

SPRAGUE was a dilettante in art as he was in life. If he had not been rich, he might perhaps have become a great artist. But, lacking the spur of poverty, he seemed incapable of sustained effort. Occasionally he was seized with a frenzy for labor ; and, for weeks at a time, he would shut himself up in his studio, until he had creditably accomplished some bit of work. But the fever was soon spent, and a reaction invariably followed, during which palette and brush were taken up only in desultory fashion. Thus it was that at the age of eight and twenty, Sprague had painted a few pictures which had attracted favorable attention at the annual exhibitions of the Academy of Design, and which the critics had spoken of as "promising"; and thus it was that the promise was as yet unfulfilled, and that Sprague, though a man of undoubted

talent, was not likely ever to rank as a genius in his profession.

Sturgis, with his keen insight into human nature, fully realized the potential capacities of the artist, and at times he could not control his impatience at his friend's inert drifting through life. But, with all their differences, these two men held each other in the highest esteem, each admiring in the other those very qualities which were lacking in himself.

The artist lived in a fashionable quarter of the city, in a bachelor apartment which included a large and commodious studio fitted up according to the latest canons of artistic taste.

On this particular New Year's morning, after waking and observing, by the filtering of a few bright sunbeams through the closely drawn blinds, that it was broad daylight, he stretched himself with a voluptuous yawn and prepared to relapse into the sensuous enjoyment of that semi-somnolent state which succeeds a night of calm and refreshing sleep.

Just as he was settling himself comfortably, however, he was startled by a knock at the bedroom door. Most men, under the circumstances, would have betrayed some vexation at being

thus unceremoniously disturbed. But there was no suspicion of annoyance in Sprague's cheery voice, as he exclaimed :

" You cannot come in yet, Mrs. O'Meagher. I am asleep, and I shall be asleep for another hour at the least. Surely you cannot have forgotten that to-day is a holiday. Happy New Year! You have time to go to several masses before——"

" Get up, old lazybones ; and don't keep a man waiting at your door in this inhospitable way, when he is in a hurry," interrupted a voice whose timbre was not that of the housekeeper, Mrs. O'Meagher.

" Oh ! is that you, Sturgis ?" laughed the artist. " Aren't you ashamed of yourself to come routing honest men out of bed at this unseemly hour ? Wait a minute, till I put on my court costume, that I may receive you with the honors and ceremonies due to your rank and station."

A couple of minutes later, the artist, picturesquely attired in a loose oriental dressing gown and fez, opened the door to his friend, Ralph Sturgis.

" Come in, old man," he said, cordially extending his hand to the reporter ; " you are welcome

at any hour of the day or night. What is it now? This is not your digestion call, I presume."

"No," replied Sturgis, "I merely dropped in to say that I should be unable to take our projected bicycle trip this afternoon. I shall probably be busy with the Knickerbocker bank case all day. By the way, if you would like to come to the bank with me, I shall be glad of your company. I am on my way there now."

"I should like nothing better," said Sprague, "but I have made an appointment for this morning with a——er——er——with a sitter."

"What, on New Year's day, you heathen!"

Sturgis observed the artist closely, and then added quizzically:

"Accept my congratulations, old man."

"Your congratulations?" inquired Sprague, coloring slightly.

"Yes; my congratulations and my condolence. My congratulations on the fact that she is young and beautiful, and possessed of all those qualities of mind and heart which——and so on and so forth. My condolence because I fear you are hit, at last."

"What do you mean?" stammered the artist

sheepishly ; " do you know her ? What do you know about her ? "

" Nothing whatever," replied Sturgis laughing, " except what you are telling me by your hesitations, your reticence and your confusion."

The artist spoke after a moment of thoughtful silence :

" Your inductions in this case are premature, to say the least. My sitter is a young lady, so much is undeniably true. And there is no doubt in my mind as to her possession of all the qualities you jocularly attribute to her ; but my interest in her is only that of the artist in a beautiful and charming woman.

" At any rate," he added, after a moment's hesitation, " I hope so ; for I have heard that she is as good as betrothed to another man."

The reporter's keen ear detected in his friend's tones a touch of genuine sadness of which the artist himself was probably unconscious. Laying his hand gently upon Sprague's shoulder, he said gravely :

" I hope so too, old man ; for you are one of those foolish men whose lives can be ruined by an unhappy love affair. I suppose it is useless to preach to you ;—more's the pity—but, in my

humble opinion, no woman's love is worth the sacrifice of a good man's life."

"Yes, I know your opinion on that subject, you old cynic," replied Sprague, "but you need not worry on my account; not yet, at all events. I am still safe; the portrait is almost finished; and I should be a fool to walk into such a scrape with my eyes wide open."

"Humph!" ejaculated Sturgis skeptically, "when a man makes a fool of himself for a woman, it matters little whether his eyes be open or shut; the result is the same."

Sprague laughed somewhat uneasily; and then, as if to change the subject:

"Come and see the picture," he said. "I should like your opinion of it."

The reporter consulted his watch.

"I shall have to come back some other time for that," he replied; "I must hurry off now to keep my appointment with Mr. Dunlap."

He started toward the door; but suddenly facing Sprague again, he held out his hand to the artist, who pressed it cordially.

"Good-bye, old man," he said affectionately; "be as sensible as you can, and don't wantonly play with the fire."

And before Sprague could frame an answer, the reporter was gone.

The artist remained thoughtfully standing until his friend's footsteps had died away in the distance. Then he turned and walked slowly into the studio. Here, in the middle of the room, stood an easel, upon which was the portrait of a beautiful young girl.

Sprague gazed at it long and earnestly. Then he heaved an almost inaudible sigh.

"Sturgis is right," he said to himself, turning away at last, "and——and I am a confounded idiot!"

CHAPTER VII.

AGNES MURDOCK.

IN a quarter of the city which is rapidly surrendering to the relentless encroachments of trade, there still stand a few old-fashioned houses, the sole survivors of what was once an aristocratic settlement.

One by one their fellows have been sapped and swept away by the resistless tide of commerce, until these ancient dwellings, stubbornly contesting a position already lost, now rear their sepulchral brownstone fronts in stiff and solitary grandeur—huge sarcophagi in a busy mart.

One of these houses stands well back from the street line, the traditional backyard of the ordinary New York dwelling having been sacrificed, in this instance, to make room for a tiny garden, which is separated from the street by a tall spiked iron railing, behind which grows an arborvitæ hedge. The former serves as a defence

against the marauding of the irrepressible metropolitan gamin; while the latter confers upon the occupants of the garden a semblance of protection from the curious gaze of the passers-by.

This property, having been the subject of an interminable lawsuit, had remained for many years unoccupied, and was even beginning to be regarded by some of the neighbors as haunted, when at last it was bought by Doctor Murdock, a wealthy widower with an only daughter. For some months masons and carpenters were at work; and then, one day, the new occupants entered into possession.

The Murdocks lived quietly but luxuriously, like people accustomed to wealth. They had their horses and carriages, their house at Lenox and at Newport, and their yacht. Their circle of acquaintances was large, and included not only the fashionable set, but also a scientific, literary and artistic set. For Doctor Murdock was a chemist of national reputation, a member of several scientific bodies, and a man of great intelligence and broad culture.

On this particular New Year's morning, Doctor Murdock was seated in his study, apparently absorbed in reading the daily papers, a pile of

which lay upon his table. His occupation might perhaps more accurately be described as skimming the daily papers; for each journal in turn was subjected to a rapid scrutiny, and only a few columns seemed occasionally to interest the reader.

There was no haste visible in the Doctor's actions, each one of which appeared to be performed with the coolness and deliberation of a man who is not the slave of time; and yet, so systematic were they, that, all lost motion being avoided, every operation was rapidly completed.

In a short time the pile of newspapers had been disposed of, and the Doctor, lighting a choice cigar, leaned back in his comfortable armchair and placidly puffed the wreathes of fragrant smoke ceilingward. He was apparently satisfied with the world and with himself, this calm, passionless man. And yet a sharp observer would have noted an almost imperceptible furrow between the eyes, which might perhaps have indicated only the healthy mental activity of an ordinary man; but which, in one given so little to outward manifestation of feeling as Doctor Murdock, might also betoken more or less serious annoyance or displeasure.

While the chemist sat in this pensive attitude, there was a rustle of skirts outside, and presently there came a gentle knock at the door of the study.

"Come in!" said Murdock, removing the cigar from his lips.

The door opened, admitting a tall and beautiful young girl, evidently not long out of her teens.

"Do I disturb you, father?" she asked, stepping lightly into the room.

"No, Agnes," replied Murdock courteously; "as you see, I am indulging in a period of *dolce far niente*."

The young girl laughed a clear, silvery laugh, as her eyes fell upon the pile of newspapers.

"If the reading of a dozen newspapers is *dolce far niente*, I should think you would welcome hard work as a pleasant change.'

"Oh!" replied her father, "the work I have done on those has not amounted to much. I have only been gleaning the news from the morning papers.

"Yes," he added, answering her surprised look, "it takes a deal of skim milk to yield a little cream."

The last paper which Murdock had been examining lay upon the desk before him. From the closely printed columns stood out in bold relief the glaring headlines :

MURDER IN A CAB.

MYSTERIOUS ASSASSINATION OF AN UNKNOWN
MAN, IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.

CABMAN REILLY DENIES ALL KNOWLEDGE OF
THE CRIME.

Miss Murdock's glance rested carelessly upon these words for an instant. They aroused in her nothing more than the mild curiosity which attaches to events of palpitating human interest, when they have been congealed in the columns of the daily newspaper and served to palates already sated with sensational verbosity.

"Mary said you wished to speak to me," said the young girl, after a short pause. "I thought I would step in to see you before going to Mr. Sprague's."

"To Sprague's?" inquired Murdock, fixing his keen eyes upon the young girl. "Ah, yes; I remember he spoke of the appointment last night. How is the portrait coming on?"

"It is almost finished. Probably only one or two more sittings, at the most, will be necessary."

Agnes seemed slightly embarrassed by the fixity of her father's searching glance. She settled herself in an armchair and assumed a look of deferent expectancy.

Not a word of affection had passed between father and daughter; not a caress had been interchanged. The relations between this impassive man and his charming daughter were those of well-bred, if somewhat distant, relatives. On the one hand, there was the uniform courtesy of the man of the world toward a woman; on the other, the deference of a young girl of good breeding toward a person much older than herself. But the note of cordial and intimate affection between father and child was absolutely missing.

And yet Agnes Murdock was naturally of an affectionate and expansive nature. During her mother's lifetime the two women had been inseparable companions, united by a strong bond of sympathy.

Mrs. Murdock had been an invalid for many years before her death, and with Agnes had lived either abroad or in the South during much

of the time in order to escape the rigors of the northern climate. Thus the father, engrossed as he was with his occupations and his scientific researches, had seen but little of his daughter during her childhood, and had been looked upon by the child almost as a stranger.

When at last, after her mother's death, Agnes, heartbroken at the loss of her only friend, returned to the paternal roof, she was a girl of sixteen. In the first loneliness of her bereavement, when, hungering for human sympathy and consolation, she turned to her father, she received patient and courteous attention, with an offer of all the material comforts and luxuries which wealth could procure ; but she failed to find the only thing she needed—a responsive human heart.

And yet, behind the cold and selfish exterior of the chemist, the young girl had touched a chord which had never vibrated before in this strange man's being. It is probable that the feeling awakened in him by his lovely daughter was the nearest approach to an absorbing human affection of which his nature was capable. Perhaps if the child had been sufficiently experienced to read her father's heart she might have persisted in her advances, and thus ultimately have

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conquered the cold reserve she had at first encountered. But she was proud and impulsive, and, bitterly disappointed in her first attempt to win from her father a demonstration of affection, she withdrew into her isolation, and ever after met his calm courtesy with an equally reserved deference. The abnormal situation, which at first was maintained only by an effort on the part of the young girl, lost with time much of its strangeness, and ultimately crystallized under the potent force of habit, so that it was accepted by the two as the natural outcome of their relationship.

In the first pang of her bereavement and disappointment, Agnes had turned for consolation to her books; and, being left free to dispose of her life as she saw fit, she had planned a course of study, which had in due time received its consecration at one of the leading colleges for women.

Upon her return from college she had, as far as she was permitted, taken charge of her father's household, and had presided with charming dignity and grace over the social functions for which Doctor Murdock's house now became famous. Up to the time of his daughter's advent the

chemist's relations with the world had been chiefly through the clubs and scientific bodies to which he belonged. He was well received in the homes of the members of New York society ; but in the absence of a woman to do the honors of his own home, he was unable to return the hospitality which he enjoyed. Now, however, everything was changed. Agnes was glad to find an outlet for her energies in the task of receiving her father's guests, and, being a girl of remarkable intelligence and tact, she succeeded in creating a salon, in the best sense of the word. Many of the shining lights in the world of art, literature, science and fashion were among the regular devotees at the shrine of this superb young goddess.

Among the younger men more than one gay moth, dazzled by the light of the girl's beautiful eyes, had been tempted to hover near the flame, only to scorch his wings. Miss Murdock had already refused several of the "best matches" of the city during her two seasons, much to the relief of those young men who had not yet summoned up courage enough to try their fate, and much to the disgust of a few amiable young women and several designing mammas. The latter could not

help but deprecate the wicked selfishness of a young girl who hypothecated and thus rendered temporarily unavailable much potential matrimonial stock, which, in the nature of things, would ultimately be thrown back on the market upon the selection by the fair one of that single bond to whose exclusive possession she was limited by the laws of church and state.

The fact of the matter was, that Agnes Murdock's ideal of life was high. She was determined, if she ever embarked upon a matrimonial venture, to do so only with a reasonably good prospect of finding in the wedded state a satisfactory outlet for the depths of affection which had remained so long unapplied in her tender maiden heart. No one among the young men who had sought her hand had seemed worthy of the great love she was ready to bestow. She was, therefore, still awaiting her fate.

"You wished to see me, sir?" the young girl gently insinuated.

"Yes," said Murdock, with great deliberation ;
"I wished to speak to you about——"

He watched her face intently, as if to read the effect which his words would produce. The light in his eyes was almost tender ; but Agnes

was not skilled in reading their scarcely perceptible shades of expression. She looked up inquiringly, noting only the slight hesitation in her father's speech.

"About a young man——" continued Murdock, with a quizzical smile.

A flush mounted to the girl's cheeks, and she fixed her eyes upon space.

"A young man who admires you greatly, and who——"

"Has he asked you to tell me this?" inquired Agnes, somewhat impatiently.

"Oh! dear no," laughed the chemist; "he is only too anxious to do so himself. He is a most impetuous fellow. But I thought it best to prepare you——"

"May I ask the name of your protégé?" interrupted the young girl.

"Did I say he was my protégé?" asked Murdock, gently. "I certainly had no intention of conveying any such impression. His name is Chatham—Thomas Chatham."

A look, half of amusement, half of vexation, came into the girl's eyes. It did not escape Murdock's close scrutiny.

"I judge from your reception of the gentle-

man's name, that his suit is not likely to meet with much favor in your eyes."

"I am not aware that I have ever given Mr. Chatham any reason to believe that it would," answered Agnes, stiffly.

"And yet you must have understood the drift of his attentions during the last few months, since——"

"Since it has been perfectly clear to every one else, you mean?"

"And yet," the young girl continued, reflectively, "I do not see how, without downright rudeness, I could have done more than I have to show him that his attentions have been distasteful to me."

"Then I may infer," said Murdock, smiling, "that you would not break your heart if——"

He seemed to hesitate in the choice of his words.

"If he should conclude to go abroad on a long journey without subjecting you to his impending proposal."

"On the contrary, father," admitted Agnes, "I should be everlastingly grateful to you if such a consummation could be brought about without unnecessary rudeness or cruelty towards Mr. Chatham."

"Very well, Agnes, that is all I wanted to see you about."

Agnes looked curiously at her father, as if to read the purpose hidden in the depths of his inscrutable eyes. She saw nothing but a polite dismissal in his calm face; and the interview between father and daughter ended, as it had begun, with formal courtesy on both sides.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PORTRAIT.

SPRAGUE was seated before his easel arranging his palette for the morning's work. The unfinished portrait of Agnes Murdock looked down upon him with eyes of living beauty. Occasionally the artist would bestow a deft touch upon the glowing canvas and would retire to a distance to note with a critical eye the new effect. Then he would consult his watch in nervous impatience; and, going to the window, he would glance anxiously up and down the street. Once or twice the rumble of wheels caused him to look up in glad expectancy, which gradually gave way to gloomy discontent as the noise died away in the distance.

At length hope seemed to depart altogether from the young man's breast. He threw down his brushes, gave up all pretence of work and drifted off into a brown study. His eyes, fixed

upon those of the portrait, had a troubled look in them ;—so troubled, that it was clearly out of all proportion to the professional disappointment of a painter kept waiting for a fair subject.

So absorbed did he become in his gloomy meditations, that, when at last a carriage stopped before the house, the artist did not hear it. But when, presently, a gentle tap sounded upon the door of the studio, he sprang to his feet, as if he had received an electric shock.

Perhaps he had ; for it was followed by a rapid current of delicious thrills tingling through every nerve and effecting in his whole being a sudden and marvelous transformation. At once the furrowed brow was smooth ; the drooping lips were wreathed in smiles ; the troubled look gave way to one of glad welcome.

For she had come at last. There she stood, with laughing brown eyes and glowing cheeks, when Sprague threw open the door. Alas, as usual, she was accompanied by her maid. Never mind ; was it not enough to have her there at all, to bask in the sunshine of her smile, to look into the dangerous depths of those soul-stirring eyes, to listen to the rippling of her silvery voice ?

"I fear I am a little late, Mr. Sprague; I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. But you see this is how it was——"

What mattered it to him now how it was? Was she not there? An eternity of suspense and misery would have been wiped out by that single entrancing fact. Her words beat upon his ear like rapturous melody; he drank them in, hardly conscious of their meaning.

Agnes Murdock, followed by her maid, proceeded at once to the dressing-room set apart for the use of the artist's models. When she returned, dressed for the sitting, she assumed under Sprague's directions the pose of the portrait, while the artist critically arranged her draperies and adjusted the shades and screens.

The maid had remained in the dressing-room.

"And so these are positively the last final touches, are they, Mr. Sprague?" asked the young girl mischievously, after a few minutes. "You artists seem to be quite as uncertain about your farewell appearances as any famous actress or singer."

The artist looked up quickly as the girl spoke. An expression of pain crossed his features.

"Yes, Miss Murdock," he answered gravely. "I shall not have to trouble you to pose again."

Miss Murdock's attention was attracted by the melancholy note in his voice. She observed him from the corner of her eyes in kindly curiosity.

The artist fell into a moody silence. For a while he worked with feverish activity at the portrait; and then, gradually falling into a fit of melancholy abstraction, he sat, with poised brush, gazing intently at the beautiful girl before him. His task forgotten, he was apparently unconscious that he was taking advantage of his privileged position to stare at his fair subject. Agnes felt his burning glance and was embarrassed by it; but, womanlike, she retained control of herself, outwardly, at all events, as she uttered some commonplace remark, which broke the spell and brought the artist to his senses with a sharp consciousness of his rudeness. He replied to the young girl's question in a low, changed voice, and then relapsed into a gloomy silence. After an awkward interval he asked suddenly:

"Are you so very glad, Miss Murdock, that our sittings are almost over?"

"Why, no, Mr. Sprague," replied Agnes; "I did not mean that. Of course I shall be glad when the portrait is finished, because I wish to have it home and to let my friends see it. But I should be indeed ungrateful if I begrudged my poor little time and trouble, when yours have been so lavishly and so ungrudgingly spent."

"These sittings have been a source of so much pleasure to me," continued Sprague thoughtfully, "that I have selfishly overlooked the fact that they could only be an annoyance and a bore to you. I fear I have needlessly prolonged them."

"But indeed, Mr. Sprague, I assure you it has been anything but a bore to me to pose. I am sure I shall miss the pleasant morning hours I have spent here."

"They have been the happiest hours of my life," said Sprague earnestly in a low voice, "and now they are nearly gone—forever."

Agnes started slightly, blushed, and riveted her gaze upon the dainty white hands which lay clasped together in her lap. Her bosom rose and fell in quickened undulations.

"Why forever, Mr. Sprague?" she asked softly; "do you think of leaving New York?"

"No," he replied quickly; "it is you who are about to desert this studio, which for a short time has been brightened by your presence——"

"Well," interrupted Agnes, "since you are not going to leave New York, I hope you will continue to call on us."

"I suppose I shall continue to call on your reception days, if that is what you mean," said Sprague somewhat disconsolately.

"Now that," laughed Agnes, "is not in line with the polite things you have been saying."

"I did not mean to say anything rude, Miss Murdock, but a call on your reception day is a call on your guests. Surrounded as you are on such occasions, one has barely a chance to catch a glimpse of you, much less to speak with you."

"We are always glad to see our friends at other times than on our reception days."

"Do you really mean it?" asked the artist eagerly. "May I call on you sometimes when the crowd is not there?"

"We shall be happy to have you call at any time, Mr. Sprague."

Sprague thought he detected a slight emphasis on the pronoun.

"But it is not *we* I wish to call on. It is *you*, Miss Murdock."

Once more the young girl's expressive eyes fixed their gaze upon the delicate hands in her lap, and once more there was a scarcely perceptible flutter beneath the lace which lay upon her white throat.

The artist sat with intent eyes fixed upon her.

"Of course I shall be pleased to have you call at any time, Mr. Sprague," she said after a brief instant.

What more could any sane man expect a modest girl to say? It is not so much the words spoken as the manner of their utterance that conveys meaning. But it is a truism that a lover is not a sane man. Sprague was not yet satisfied. He was about to speak again, when a knock sounded upon the door.

It was the hall-boy with a letter.

"Miss Murdock?" he inquired, glancing in the direction of the young girl.

"For me?" exclaimed Agnes, surprised.

"Yes, Miss; a gentleman left it for you."

Agnes took the letter, inspected it curiously for an instant; then, excusing herself, she tore open the envelope and unfolded the note which it contained.

At once a deep flush suffused her face, and an expression of annoyance passed over her features. She glanced up hastily at Sprague, who was apparently hard at work upon the background of the picture.

The hall-boy was waiting expectantly.

"There is no answer," said Agnes quietly.

And as the stern mandates of fashion either forbid a woman to wear a pocket, or else decree that it shall be located in some practically inaccessible position, the young girl dropped the letter and its envelope into her lap and resumed the pose.

Sprague tried to renew the conversation where it had been interrupted; but his efforts were in vain. Both he and Agnes were preoccupied during the balance of the sitting.

When at last the time came for Miss Murdock to leave, Sprague accompanied her to her carriage. After watching it until it disappeared around the corner, he returned moodily to the studio.

As he entered the room, his eyes fixed in a vacant stare upon the floor, he caught sight of something white—a sheet of paper—resting there. Mechanically he pushed it to one side with his foot.

The sunshine seemed to have gone with Agnes Murdock. A gloom had fallen upon the place and its occupant. The artist tried to work; but he was restless and depressed. At length he threw down his brushes; and rising from the easel, he put on his hat and coat and started out for a walk, in the hope that exercise would drive away the blue devils whose grip he felt tightening upon his heartstrings.

Meeting some friends in the course of his aimless wanderings, he was persuaded to spend the rest of the day in their company, and returned to his bachelor quarters late in the evening, tired enough physically to obtain that healthful sleep which is the boon of strong youth.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KNICKERBOCKER BANK.

RICHARD DUNLAP was a man who had never missed a train nor been late in keeping an appointment. On the morning following Sprague's dinner party, he walked briskly down Broadway from City Hall. It was New Year's day; the great thoroughfare was deserted. As he turned into Wall Street, the hands of the clock in Trinity steeple pointed to three minutes of nine. The financier pulled out his chronometer, found that the clock in the old belfry was right, and quickened his pace.

Wall Street slumbered peacefully and silently, like a battle-field after the roar of the cannon has been hushed, after the victors and the vanquished have disappeared, leaving behind them only the ghosts of the slain. The deathlike stillness was oppressive.

At last, as Dunlap reached the Knickerbocker bank, the clock in the belfry struck the hour.

The reporter was not there. The banker uttered an ejaculation of annoyance. He looked up and down the street. There was no one in sight. He resolved to give Sturgis five minutes grace, and began to pace back and forth before the entrance to the bank. Then a thought struck him. There was another entrance on Exchange Place—that generally used by the employés and officials. Perhaps the reporter was waiting there. Dunlap walked around to Exchange Place and glanced up the street. He saw a man standing in the gutter and bending low over the curb. Dunlap advanced so as to obtain a front view of him and recognized Sturgis. The reporter had not noticed his approach; he held a magnifying glass in his hand and seemed deeply interested in a minute examination of the smooth-worn curb.

“Good morning, Mr. Sturgis,” said the banker, “have you lost something?”

The reporter looked up quietly.

“No, Mr. Dunlap; I have found something;—something which may possibly prove to be a hyphen.”

“A what?” asked the banker, perplexed.

“A hyphen connecting two parts of a very pretty little puzzle.”

Dunlap stared curiously at the curb.

"I can see nothing there," said he.

Sturgis handed him the magnifying glass.

"Now look again."

He pointed out a particular portion of the curb. Dunlap looked in the direction indicated.

"I see what looks like dried mud, dust particles, and a little dark spot or stain."

"Yes," said Sturgis, "that dark spot is the hyphen. There were probably others like it on the sidewalk yesterday afternoon, but they have been obliterated by the pedestrians. Here, however, are some that have remained."

As he spoke, he led Dunlap to the Exchange Place entrance of the bank, and pointed out a number of similar spots on the stone steps.

"Fortunately," he said, as if speaking to himself, "fortunately the detectives entered through the front door last night; so that they did not interfere with this portion of the trail."

"But what are these spots?" asked the banker.

"They are blood-stains," replied the reporter. "I have every reason to believe them to be human blood. But that question I can settle positively as soon as we are in the bank, for I have brought a powerful microscope. Let us enter

now, if you like; I have seen all there is to be seen outside. By the way, do you know this key?"

He held up a large steel key of complicated structure.

"Why," exclaimed Dunlap surprised, "that looks like the key to the Exchange Place door. Where did you find it?"

"In the gutter, near the sewer opening at the corner."

"But how did it get there?" asked Dunlap anxiously.

"Perhaps I shall be able to answer that question presently," said Sturgis. "Shall we go in now? No, not that way. Let us enter by the Wall Street side, if you please."

A couple of minutes later, the outer door of the Knickerbocker bank was unlocked.

"Excuse me if I pass in first," said Sturgis, entering. "I wish to see something here."

He bent low over the tiled entrance, with the magnifying glass in his hand.

"It is too bad," he muttered to himself presently. "They have trodden all over the trail here. Ah! what is this?"

"What?" inquired Dunlap.

The reporter vouchsafed no reply to this question, but asked another.

"Is Thursday a general cleaning day at the bank?"

"Yes," answered the banker. "Every evening, after the closing hour, the floors are swept, of course, and the desks are dusted; but Mondays and Thursdays are reserved for washing the windows, scrubbing the floors, and so forth."

"Then it is lucky that yesterday was Thursday," observed Sturgis. "Will you please hand me the key to this gate, and that to the inner door."

Upon entering the bank, Sturgis requested his companion to seat himself on a particular chair, which he designated. He then began a critical examination of the premises. Inch by inch he scrutinized the walls, the floor, and even the ceiling; sometimes with the naked eye, sometimes through the magnifying glass. He also constantly brought into play a tape measure; and several times he called upon Dunlap for assistance, when the distances to be measured were longer than his reach.

The Wall Street entrance of the Knickerbocker bank led directly into the space to which the

public was admitted. This space was partitioned off, as usual, from the bookkeepers' and cashier's departments. At the farther end, a door led into a reception room communicating with the president's office. This office itself opened into the cashier's department on one side; and on the other, into a small room occupied by the president's secretary and typewriter, and into the vestibule of the Exchange Place entrance to the bank. On the right of the vestibule was a large room in which the bank employes kept their street clothing, and to which they could retire when they were off duty. A door from the clerks' room led into the cashier's department; while another one opened into the private secretary's room.

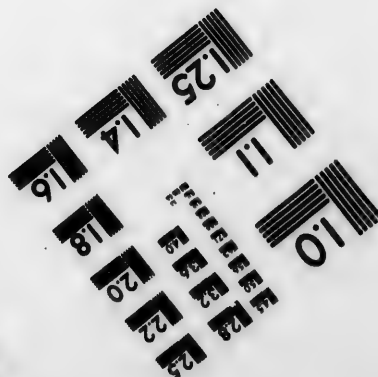
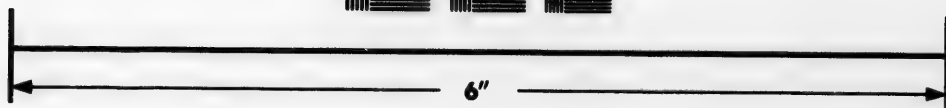
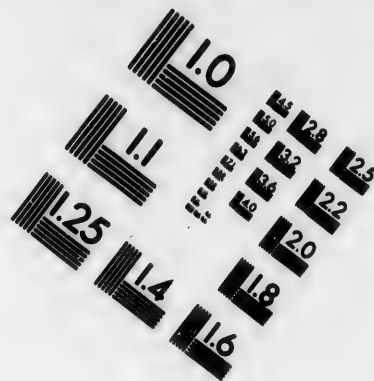
After he had finished his inspection of the space open to the public, Sturgis, followed by Dunlap, passed into the president's reception room, and thence in turn into the other rooms, and finally into the cashier's and bookkeepers' departments.

Several times he stopped, retraced his footsteps to some particular point, and then began his search anew. At times he crawled about on his hands and knees; at others, he climbed upon the

furniture, the better to examine some spot upon the wall. In the president's office he stopped to pick up a great number of tiny scraps of paper, which lay in and around the waste-basket. These he carefully placed in an envelope which he laid upon the president's table.

On one side of the room there stood a magnificent old-fashioned carved mantel-piece. The artistic beauty of the structure did not seem to strike Sturgis; but he appeared to derive a great deal of satisfaction from an inspection of the large tiled hearth. Presently, removing his coat and his cuffs, he plunged his hand into the grimy chimney and removed a handful of soot, which he examined carefully and then threw away. He repeated the operation again and again; until at last, with evident satisfaction, he picked out a small object, which he deposited in an envelope. Then, after washing his hands in the clerks' room, he passed into the cashier's department. In a corner stood the telephone closet, the door of which was open. The receiver of the instrument was down. The reporter took it up and gazed at it long and earnestly.

Sturgis's examination of the bank must have lasted over two hours. At first Richard Dunlap



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looked on with a mild curiosity, in which amusement struggled with good-natured skepticism. But, as time wore on, the banker began to show signs of impatience ; and when at last Sturgis returned to the private office and carefully deposited upon a sheet of white paper a miscellaneous assortment of tiny scraps and shreds, the banker could scarcely conceal his dissatisfaction.

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," he said, "I hope you have nearly completed your investigation ; for my leisure is not so abundant that I can afford to waste it like this."

"I need one more witness at least," replied the reporter, "and I am afraid I shall have to ask you to help me obtain it."

"But," he quickly added as he noted Dunlap's impatient gesture, "I think I can promise you that the time you are regretting has not been wasted."

The financier did not seem convinced by this assertion ; but he nevertheless consented with unwilling grace to assist the reporter to the best of his ability.

"Well, then," said Sturgis, "tell me, first of all, whether you keep any fire-arms in the bank."

"Yes," replied Dunlap ; "the cashier has a

small revolver which he keeps in his desk, as a means of defence in case of a sudden attack by a bank thief."

"Have you a key to the desk?"

"Yes," replied the banker.

"Will you kindly see if the revolver you mention is in its place?"

"It ought to be," said Dunlap, picking out the key on a bunch which he took from his pocket, and walking towards the cashier's department with Sturgis at his heels.

"Yes, here it is in its accustomed place."

He handed the weapon to the reporter, who examined it attentively.

"Exactly," said Sturgis, with satisfaction; "this is what I was looking for."

"What do you mean?" asked Dunlap.

"I mean that this is the revolver which was fired twice last night in the Knickerbocker bank. See for yourself; two of the cartridges are empty, and the weapon has not been cleaned since these shots were fired."

"But who can have fired the pistol, and at whom was it fired, and why?"

"Hold on! hold on!" exclaimed Sturgis, smiling; "one thing at a time. We shall perhaps

come to that soon. For the present, if you will come back to your private office, I shall endeavor to piece together the scraps of evidence which I have been able to collect. There, sit down in your own armchair, if you will, while I fit these bits of paper together; and in less than ten minutes I shall probably be ready to proceed with my story."

Dunlap was still nervous and impatient; but all trace of amusement and skepticism had vanished from his face, as he took the proffered armchair and watched Sturgis patiently piece together the tiny fragments of paper he had so carefully gathered. When this work was accomplished, the reporter went to the typewriter and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper. He next proceeded to examine under the microscope the minute fragments and particles which he had collected in his search.

When he had finished this operation, he leaned back in his chair and looked up into space for what seemed to Dunlap an interminable length of time. Then at last he glanced over at the banker, who could hardly contain his growing impatience.

"I am ready to go on now," said Sturgis,

reaching for a sheet of paper, upon which he began to draw with ruler and pencil.

"At last!" sighed the banker.

"Yes; but my first, as the charades say, is a question."

"Another!" gasped Dunlap; "when is my turn to come?"

"Just a few more," replied Sturgis, "and then your turn will come for good."

"Well, out with your questions then, if you must," said Dunlap, settling himself resignedly in his chair.

CHAPTER X.

PIECING THE EVIDENCE.

STURGIS was still busy with his diagram. He spoke without looking up from his work.

"Who besides yourself has a key to the drawer in which this revolver is kept?"

"The cashier has one and the head bookkeeper has another."

"You mean the bookkeeper who sits at the desk at the extreme right in the bookkeepers' department?"

"Yes," replied Dunlap, "that is Mr. Arbogast's desk. Do you know him?"

"No. What did you say the gentleman's name is?" The reporter looked up and prepared to make a note of it.

"John W. Arbogast."

"A man something over fifty years of age, quite bald, with a fringe of gray hair; wears a heavy moustache and side-whiskers; and had on

yesterday afternoon, when you last saw him, a pepper-and-salt business suit," said Sturgis, writing down the name in his note book.

Dunlap stared at the reporter in amazement. Sturgis smiled slightly.

"I met the gentleman yesterday afternoon," he explained.

"Oh! that accounts for it," exclaimed the banker. "I see—but—but then, how comes it that you did not know his name?"

"He did not tell me his name," said Sturgis gravely, "and I did not know until just now that he was employed in the Knickerbocker bank. How long has he been with you?"

"Nearly twenty years; but only for the last five years as head bookkeeper."

"I suppose you have every confidence in his honesty?" asked the reporter, looking critically at the diagram before him.

"Of course. Such a position is not given to a man unless his record is excellent."

"And yet," observed the reporter reflectively, "opportunity sometimes makes the thief."

"True; but the duty of a bank president is to reduce such opportunities to a minimum," said Dunlap somewhat pompously.

"Quite so," assented Sturgis, "and this you accomplish by——"

"By having the books examined periodically," answered the banker, rubbing his hands together with calm satisfaction.

"I see," said the reporter, who had now finished his sketch. "Do the employés of the bank know when an examination of this kind is to be made?"

"They do not even know that such examinations *are* made. No one but the accountant and myself are in the secret; for the overhauling of the books is done entirely at night, after the bank is closed."

"Have the books been recently examined?" asked Sturgis carelessly.

"Yes; only last week."

"Well?"

"They were found to be all right as usual."

"May I ask by whom?"

"By Murray and Scott, the expert accountants."

"Was the examination conducted by Mr. Murray or by Mr. Scott?"

"By neither. For many years the work was done by one or the other of the members of the

firm; but since their business has grown to its present proportions, Messrs. Murray and Scott are no longer able to give personal attention to their customers. For the last two years they have sent us a trusted employé, Mr. Chatham——Thomas Chatham."

"Yes," said Sturgis, who was apparently wool-gathering.

A silence of several minutes followed, during which the reporter thoughtfully inspected his collection of microscopic odds and ends, while Dunlap beat the devil's tattoo upon the desk.

Presently the reporter spoke again.

"Do you know a young man, about five feet eight inches tall, with fiery red hair, who affects somewhat loud clothes?"

"Why, that is Thomas Chatham. You know him, then?"

"I? No; I never heard of him before."

"Then, how on earth do you know——?"

"He has been here recently."

"Yes; I told you he had been here last week; but——"

"No; I mean he was here yesterday afternoon," interrupted the reporter.

"Not to my knowledge," said Dunlap incredulously.

"I thought as much," Sturgis replied quietly; "but he was here, for all that."

The banker looked perplexed.

"Now, another thing," continued Sturgis. "I notice in the bookkeepers' department an announcement to the effect that on January second,—that is to say, to-morrow,—a new system of bookkeeping will be adopted. Would this be such as to bring to light any irregularities that might exist in the books?"

"Yes; it involves the transfer of each bookkeeper every month to a different set of books. But I fail to see the drift of your questions."

"You will see it presently. Have you examined the safes this morning?"

"Yes; one of the first things I did, after you allowed me to move at all, was to examine the cash safe."

"Ah, yes; the cash safe. And you found its contents intact?"

"Perfectly," said the banker triumphantly.

"But there is also a safe in the bookkeepers' department."

"It contains nothing but the books, which of

course would have no value to any one but ourselves."

"You have not examined this safe?"

"Why, no; I——"

"If you have no objection, I should like to see the interior of that safe. I suppose, of course, you know the combination of that as well as that of the cash safe?"

"Oh, yes; the combinations are changed every Saturday, and of course I am always informed of the new combination."

"Then may I examine the bookkeepers' safe?"

"I see no objection to your doing so, if you like."

Dunlap seemed surprised at the reporter's request; but he rose and proceeded to the bookkeepers' department. Sturgis followed an instant later.

When the reporter came within sight of the safe, Dunlap was closely inspecting the lock. Presently he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Sturgis.

"I don't understand it," said Dunlap. "I cannot open the safe. The lock seems all right; but——"

"Perhaps the combination has been changed."

"Apparently it has," admitted the banker ;
"but how came it to be changed on a week day,
and without my knowledge?"

"That is rather significant, isn't it?" suggested
the reporter.

"Significant? What do you mean?" exclaimed
Dunlap excitedly.

"I mean that Arbogast was a defaulter. What
his system of defrauding the bank was, I do not
yet know ; but an examination of the books will
no doubt reveal this ; and I should advise you,
Mr. Dunlap, to lose no time in having it made."

"But," argued Dunlap anxiously, "I tell you
the books were examined last week."

"Yes ; by Arbogast's accomplice."

"What, Chatham his accomplice?" exclaimed
Dunlap faintly.

"Chatham was in the plot beyond a doubt,"
answered Sturgis. "So long as no one had
access to his books except his accomplice
Chatham, of course Arbogast felt secure. But
when, yesterday, the announcement was made
that after the beginning of the new year his
books would pass to the custody of another man,
he saw that the game was up."

The men had returned to the president's office.

"Those are his very words," continued the reporter; "those he telegraphed to Chatham yesterday, as you will see if you hold before that mirror this sheet of blotting paper which I found on Arbogast's desk."

Dunlap, with an unsteady hand, took the blotting paper; and, holding it before the glass, studied the reflection intently.

"What do you make out?" asked Sturgis.

"Nothing whatever," replied the banker promptly.

"What?" exclaimed the reporter; "do you mean to say that you do not distinguish any marks on the blotting paper?"

"I mean to say that I do not see anything to which I can attach any semblance of a meaning. The blotting paper has been used, and, of course, there are ink marks upon it; but, as far as I can see, these are wholly disconnected. They are entirely void of sense to my eyes, at any rate."

"Examine the blotter again carefully in this direction," said Sturgis, drawing an imaginary line upon the mirror, "and pay no attention to any other marks which seem to cross these lines. Now do you see anything?"

The banker examined the image in the mirror for some time before replying.

"If I allow my imagination to enter into play, I can complete several isolated letters."

"Will you dictate these while I note them here. Be careful to distinguish between capital and lower-case letters. Also separate the lines, and state whether letters come close together or are separated by a space."

"Very well," agreed Dunlap, who then proceeded to read off the letters he saw in the reflection of the blotter in the mirror.

When he had finished, Sturgis handed him the paper, upon which were transcribed the letters he had dictated. They presented the appearance shown below:

				<i>D</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>6</i>
	<i>s</i>	<i>Ch</i>		<i>m</i>		
					<i>'</i>	<i>y</i>
					<i>y</i>	
<i>G</i>	<i>e</i>		<i>p</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>m</i>
						<i>t</i>
<i>c</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>		<i>th</i>		<i>u</i>
						<i>s</i>
		<i>r</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>s</i>
					<i>J</i>	
						<i>g</i>
						<i>t</i>

"Well," said the banker, "if you can make anything out of that gibberish, your imagination is more active than mine."

"It is not a question of imagination," said Sturgis; "let us proceed systematically. Here is a telegram blank detached from a pad I found on Arbogast's desk. Compare its size with the outline of the marks on the blotter, and you will see, in the first place, that the message would just fit snugly on this sheet. Next, you will probably admit that the first line of marks on the blotter probably contain a date; the second, a name; the third, an address; the last, a signature, and the intermediate lines a message."

"I am quite willing to concede so much; for no business man would be likely to write a telegram differently."

"Very well. Now, then, let me hold this blank so that the reflection of its vertical rulings may appear just above the image of the message. These lines, remember, separate the words of the message. Extend them mentally and note how they divide the letters of the blotter. Will you hold these sheets while I transcribe the result?"

In a few minutes more the reporter had drawn several lines on his copy of the reflection in the mirror.

"I don't see that you are any better off now

than you were before," remarked Dunlap, examining the result.

"Wait a minute. These vertical lines, we say, divide the words of the message. There are five words to the line; only two on the last line before the signature; that is to say, twelve words in the message. Now, consider the first word. Evidently the 'G' begins this word, since it is a capital; and the flourish on the tail of the 'e' tells us plainly enough where the word ends. Note the space between the 'G' and the 'e.' Have you ever taken the trouble to ascertain how constant in any given handwriting is the space occupied by the different letters? Try it some time. Count the characters which you have written in a number of different lines, reckoning spaces and punctuation marks each as one character, and observe how closely the results will tally. Basing my conclusion on this fact, I may safely affirm that the first word of the message is 'Game,' 'Gave,' 'Give,' or some other word of four letters beginning with 'G' and ending with 'e.' I shall proceed to fill up the balance of the message as I read it between the letters."

i Sturgis wrote slowly and carefully for a few minutes.

"There ; behold the result."

The message had now assumed this form :

Dec., 31, 1896.

Thomas Chatham,

—, *B'way, City.*

<i>Game corner four</i>	<i>up South thirty</i>	<i>Meet and</i>	<i>me Wall</i>	<i>to-day streets</i>
---------------------------------	--------------------------------	---------------------	--------------------	---------------------------

J. W. Arbogast.

"Compare this with the reflection of the original and tell me if you do not now detect various isolated marks and incomplete letters, all of which tally with the text I have inserted here."

Dunlap made the comparison.

"I am obliged to admit that your conclusions now appear plausible," he reluctantly admitted.

Sturgis shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, call them plausible and let us proceed. Chatham kept the appointment yesterday ; but for some reason Arbogast was delayed in leaving the bank. Perhaps the necessary preparations for his flight took longer than he expected."

"You think he intended to abscond?"

"Why should he have changed the combination of his safe, as he did, if not to give himself as much time as possible to reach a place of

comparative safety before the books could be examined?" asked Sturgis. "Chatham, becoming impatient, forgot the dictates of prudence and started for the bank to ascertain the cause of his accomplice's delay. He met Arbogast at the Wall Street door. The two men re-entered, Arbogast setting down his satchel in the vestibule and leaving the outer door ajar, as Quinlan found it a few minutes later, when he stole the satchel. I have every reason to believe that it was at Chatham's request that the men returned. He wished to use the telephone, and he did so."

"Your story is connected, and it is certainly not lacking in details," said Dunlap incredulously; "in fact, the details are far too abundant for the evidence thus far advanced."

"Every one of the details is based upon facts," replied Sturgis. "What I have accomplished thus far has been simple enough, because luck has favored us. Yesterday being cleaning day at the bank, the floors were scrubbed some time during the afternoon, before Arbogast was ready to leave and before Chatham had arrived. It thus happens that almost every footstep of the two men has remained faintly but distinctly outlined upon the wet floors, which have since

dried, preserving the record. The detectives last night obliterated a portion of this record ; but they have left traces enough for our purpose. If you care to crawl around on all fours as I did you can readily distinguish these traces for yourself."

"No, thank you, " answered the banker. "I prefer to take your word for this part of the evidence."

"Then I shall resume my story," said Sturgis. "The footprints show that Arbogast stood at his desk while the scrubbing was going on. We may safely say that it was after half-past four o'clock when he started to leave the bank ; for otherwise it is presumable that Chatham would have waited for him at the corner of South and Wall Streets, as he was asked to do in the book-keeper's telegram. He first walked over to the safe and closed it, changing the combination, so that the lock could not be opened until he had had a fair start. Next he went to the clerks' room for his hat and coat and for the satchel in which he had packed just the few necessities for immediate use in his flight. He started to leave the building through the Exchange Place door ; but probably remembered that the Wall Street

door was not locked, and went back to lock it. As he was about to close the outer door, Chatham arrived on the scene, and the two men re-entered, as we have already seen. The footprints tell their story fully and absolutely, their chronological order being established by the occasional obliteration of a footprint in one trail by another in a subsequent trail. The two men walked back into the room in which we now are. Their actions after this will be clearer to you if you will follow on this diagram."

CHAPTER XI.

A RECONSTRUCTED DRAMA.

As he spoke, Sturgis handed Dunlap the sheet of paper upon which he had traced a plan of the Knickerbocker bank.

"From this point on," he continued, "I have indicated the various trails on the diagram. The dotted lines represent Arbogast's footprints; the continuous lines show Chatham's trail."

"How can you distinguish between the two?" inquired Dunlap.

"There is no difficulty about that," replied Sturgis. "The differences are very marked. I know Arbogast's foot because I have seen it; and I know that the other one is Chatham's because you recognized the man from the description I gave of him."

"Yes, I know. But how could you describe him so accurately when you have never seen him?"

"I shall come to that presently," said Sturgis,

smiling; "you must let me tell my story in my own way, if I am to tell it connectedly."

"Very well," said the banker, resignedly. "Hold on, though," he exclaimed; "you speak of two sets of trails; but what is this third set of lines, marked by alternate dots and dashes?"

"They represent the traces of a third individual, who will appear upon the scene later on. He has not yet received his cue. But, since you mention him, we may put him down in the cast as 'X,' the unknown quantity of the problem; for I do not yet know his name. Now, then; let me see. Where was I? Your interruption has made me lose the thread. Oh, yes; the men were in this room. Arbogast, nervous and excited, paced back and forth, like a caged animal. Chatham was more collected. It was warm in the bank, as compared with the intense cold outside; he removed his overcoat and threw it over the back of that chair in the corner. This fact is shown by the direction of the footsteps toward the chair, and by a mark directly below the arm of the chair where the garment trailed upon the wet floor. Chatham's carelessness was fraught with serious consequences; for, as luck would have it, there was, in one of the

pockets of his coat, an important letter, which slipped out and fell upon the floor superscription uppermost. Here is the envelope itself, which I have pieced together. You will see that it is soiled only upon the back, and here near the chair is the faint oblong mark which it left upon the floor. Chatham went to the telephone in the cashier's office. He probably did not see the letter fall. It caught Arbogast's eye, however; and you may imagine his surprise when he saw that it was addressed to his wife. What had his accomplice to write to his wife? Arbogast evidently was not restrained by any feelings of delicacy in the matter, or else he was already suspicious of Chatham; for he picked up the envelope, tore it open, and read the letter which lies before you, as I have pieced it together. It makes interesting reading. I do not wonder that Arbogast lost his head when he saw it. Read it for yourself."

"Why," exclaimed Dunlap, after reading the letter, "this announces his intention of committing suicide."

"Precisely; and yet Arbogast did not commit suicide; probably never had any intention of doing so; and, at any rate, did not write that

letter. You will observe that it is not signed; the name is typewritten, like the rest of the letter, which, moreover, was not written here, as the superscription would seem to indicate. I have tried your typewriter, and although it is of the same make as the one upon which this letter was written, there are several characteristic differences in the alignment and in the imperfections of the type.

"Besides," continued Sturgis, thoughtfully, "the letter itself bears evidence, on its face, that it could not have been written by Arbogast. Your bookkeeper was of a weak, nervous, excitable temperament, as all his actions plainly show. Before such a man is brought to the point of taking his own life, he must have passed through a more or less protracted period of agonizing nervous tension, of which you and I can hardly form any adequate conception. Under the circumstances, if he loved his wife, conscious that by his guilt he was about to plunge her into the depths of grief and shame, he might have written her an incoherent and hysterical letter, or a tender and repentant letter, but never this frigid matter-of-fact statement of a supreme decision. This letter is the work of a cold and cal-

culating nature, incapable of ordinary human feeling. The man who wrote it would not have written to his wife at all, or would have written only to serve some selfish purpose. From what I know of Arbogast, I do not believe he was capable of composing these lines."

"You think, then, that the letter was written by Chatham," said Dunlap. "But what object could Chatham have for writing such a letter?"

"No," answered Sturgis, "I do not think that Chatham wrote this letter. That is the curious part of it. I cannot believe that if Chatham had been aware of the important nature of its contents, he could have been willing to leave it for an instant within Arbogast's reach."

"But who, then, could have been its author, and why should he have intrusted the letter to Chatham?"

"To your second question, my answer is, probably because he wanted it mailed from the main Post Office at about the time that Arbogast would leave the bank. To the first, I cannot yet give any positive answer, although, as you will presently see, there are some clues pointing to our unknown quantity 'X' as the author of this letter. But let us not anticipate. Suppose we

return to our drama. When Arbogast read this letter, he evidently thought, as I do, that somebody was playing him false ; that he was to be gotten rid of in some safer way than exile ; in short that, as somebody said of one of the Turkish sultans, he was to be 'suicided.' He must have had strong reasons to suspect Chatham of treachery ; for he at once impulsively jumped to the conclusion that his only chance of safety lay in striking before he could be struck. At any rate, while the accountant was busy at the telephone, Arbogast stood near this desk, mechanically tearing to pieces this letter, while he planned the accountant's death. He had taken with him your revolver. As the thought of it flashed upon his mind, his resolution was instantly taken. He stealthily crept to the paying teller's wicket. Through it he could see the telephone closet, the door of which stood open. Chatham was in direct range, as Arbogast raised the pistol, and, without a word of warning, fired. The accountant held the receiver of the telephone to his ear. This saved his life ; for the bullet entered his left hand and remained embedded in his flesh. I shall show you the blood-stained receiver in proof of this assertion. When the bullet struck

him, Chatham fell forward, striking his head against a corner of the telephone box, and inflicting a slight scalp wound. I found a few hairs of an intensely red hue, which are evidently his. I also found shreds of his clothing which caught on a projecting nail as he fell; and I infer from these his taste for loud dress. He recovered himself before Arbogast was ready to fire a second time and ran into the clerks' room, probably hoping to make his way to the street through the Exchange Place door. But at the same time, Arbogast rushed through the reception room and this office, reaching the vestibule in time to head off Chatham, who then turned back and ran through the secretary's room, with Arbogast in pursuit. In the meantime, 'X,' to whom I have already alluded, was waiting in Exchange Place, where Chatham had a cab. Upon hearing the pistol shot, he went to the accountant's assistance. He passed into this office, which he probably reached in time to see Chatham rush in from the secretary's room, closely followed by Arbogast. 'X' seized that chair over there in the corner and sprang between the hunted man and his pursuer as the latter raised his arm to fire. Our anonymous friend is prob-

ably a man of great strength ; for with one blow of the chair, he broke the bookkeeper's wrist. The hammer fell ; but the weapon was deflected, and the bullet, instead of reaching its intended victim, passed through the upper lobe of Arbogast's left lung, and out at the back at an angle of about sixty degrees. The bookkeeper was standing not far from the mantel-piece yonder. Do you see that broad black line on the hearth ? That was made by the bullet. Its direction and the angle enabled me at once to see that it must have ricocheted into the fire-place ; and there, sure enough, I found it in the soot in the bend of the chimney. Here it is."

Dunlap had listened to this narrative with evident interest. But now, recovering from the spell of Sturgis's persuasive conviction, his skepticism regained the ascendancy for a moment.

"Mr. Sturgis, you have missed your vocation," he said, laughing good naturedly ; "you ought to have been a playwright. You have a most convincing way of presenting both your facts and your theories. While you are speaking, one is ready to admit the plausibility of every statement you make. But now that you have finished, I have become a hard-headed banker once

more, and I beg to submit one or two facts—since we are seeking facts—which it seems to me are enough to demolish all your elaborate structure.”

“Go on,” said Sturgis ; “it goes without saying that any theory is worthless unless it takes into account and explains every existing fact. If there are any in this case which have escaped me—a contingency which is quite possible, for I have no pretension to infallibility—I shall be glad to hear about them ; and naturally, if my conclusions do not tally with the facts, the conclusions must be altered, since facts are absolute.”

“Well then,” said Dunlap, “assuming, for the sake of the argument, that these various marks which you have called trails were made by the feet of three different people ; admitting even that one of these individuals was Arbogast, who often stays here after banking hours, I do not see that you have established by any satisfactory evidence your assumption that the other so-called trails are those of Chatham and a stranger. For aught I know to the contrary, they may have been made by some of the bank employés in the discharge of their regular duties. Chatham’s coat may have caught on a nail in the telephone

closet last week, while he was here in his legitimate capacity of expert accountant. The change of the combination of the safe may be the result of an error; for we have no direct proof whatever that Arbogast is a defaulter. And then, when it comes to your interesting description of the alleged shooting of Arbogast, it strikes me that you are entirely carried away by your enthusiasm; for, in your minute description of the path of the bullet, at a certain angle, of which you seem to know the measure almost to the fraction of a second, you overlook several important things. Two shots were fired yesterday in or near the Knickerbocker bank. *In*, say you, because here is a revolver with two empty cartridge shells; here is a black mark, which may have been produced by the ricochet of a bullet, and here is a shapeless piece of lead, which may be that bullet. As, however, one bullet cannot account for two shots, you are forced at once to assume that Chatham has carried away the second one in the palm of his hand. This is ingenious, very ingenious, but——"

"His blood is on the telephone receiver," observed Sturgis quietly.

"Blood!" exclaimed Dunlap; "why, with the

carnage that you have imagined here, there should be oceans of blood. Here is a man, running around with a wounded hand, who leaves a few drops of blood on the telephone receiver, and nowhere else. And here is another man, shot through the lungs,—excuse me, through the upper lobe of the left lung,—who does not bleed at all. And where is he now? Such a wound as you have given him must, I take it, be fatal, or, at any rate, serious. Yet here is a dead or, at least, a dying man, calmly walking off as if—as if the curtain had fallen at the end of your drama, and the corpse had hurried off to his dressing-room.”

“You have forgotten something else,” suggested the reporter smiling.

Dunlap looked at him questioningly.

“Yes; you have forgotten the pistol replaced in the drawer after Arbogast was shot, and the doors of the bank carefully locked.”

“True. No, my dear sir; your elaborate theory will not bear an instant’s calm examination.”

“And yet,” rejoined Sturgis, “my conclusions, as far as they go, are absolutely correct. Every objection which you raise is plausible enough

when considered by itself; but we have not to deal with a lot of isolated facts, but with a series of connected events, each of which depends upon and supports all the others. Let me finish my story, and I think you will then be prepared to admit that what seems to you now a flight of fancy on my part, is nothing but a sober exposition of plain unvarnished facts."

Dunlap, with a deprecating gesture, settled back into his chair once more.

"We left Arbogast shot through the left lung, —fatally wounded, as you have just remarked. He probably fell like a log; while Chatham, weak from shock, leaned against the door jamb yonder. He had probably stanchd his wound with his free hand as he ran; I have been unable to find any trace of blood between the telephone and this spot. On the door jamb, however, the blood left a stain which has not been completely wiped out and which enabled me to judge of Chatham's height. 'X' was the only one of the trio who knew what he was about at this time. I have a genuine admiration for 'X'; he must be a man of marvelous nerve. Instead of flying panic-stricken from the scene, as any ordinary criminal would have done,

he calmly proceeded to protect his retreat and to systematically cover his trail. His first step was to lock the Wall Street gate and the inside door. Quinlan had doubtless pulled the outer door to as he ran away, so that 'X' probably thought this also locked. He then, with Chatham's assistance, helped Arbogast, who was not yet dead, and who perhaps by this time had regained consciousness, into the cab which was waiting near by in Exchange Place, where I found the blood-stains on the curb, as you will remember. After starting off his two accomplices in the cab, he returned to the bank, put away the pistol in its proper place, which, by the way, he seems to have known, and washed up all or nearly all the blood-stains. There is a sponge and bucket under the sink in the clerks' room, which were used in this operation. After, as he thought, completely obliterating all traces of the tragedy, he quietly walked off by the Exchange Place entrance, locked the door and threw away the key. All this, while policeman Flynn was chasing Quinlan. You will note that 'X,' knowing nothing of the Quinlan episode, was quite justified in believing that the shots had failed to attract any attention outside of the bank. Very likely he was

disturbed by the return of the policeman and Quinlan ; I cannot otherwise account for his having left the gas burning. Had he had the time, I feel confident that, with his customary thoroughness, he would have turned it out. As to my minute description of Arbogast's wounds, there is nothing remarkable in that. I know that the weapon used by 'X' was yonder chair, because I found particles of the bookkeeper's epidermis upon one of the legs, which was considerably loosened by the blow. But I know exactly what the wounds were, because I have examined them. I told you that I had seen Arbogast yesterday."

"What!" exclaimed Dunlap, "you mean after he was wounded?"

"Yes," replied Sturgis ; "his body is at the morgue now. You might call there this afternoon to identify it, if you choose ; but, everything considered, it might be as well not to make the identification public until we are well on the track of Chatham and our friend 'X.'"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOOKKEEPER'S CONFESSION.

LATE that same evening, Sturgis returned to his lodgings, after a busy day spent in working upon the Knickerbocker bank case. He was tired and he was perplexed; for, with all his unflagging energy, his quick intelligence and his plodding perseverance, he had come to a standstill in his investigation. The *Evening Tempest* had appeared with no further mention of the Quinlan case, and with only a perfunctory report of the Cab Mystery, no attempt having been made to connect the two, for Sturgis would not consent to publish his evidence until he was sure of complete success in his undertaking.

As he approached the house, the reporter saw a light in his window, and inferred that a visitor was awaiting his coming. It was Mr. Dunlap, who, pale and care-worn, was striding nervously back and forth in the room, with his hands be-

hind his back and his head bent forward upon his breast.

"Ah, there you are at last!" exclaimed the banker eagerly; "I have been waiting for you for over an hour."

"Has something new turned up?" asked Sturgis.

"Yes; read that."

At the same time Dunlap handed the reporter a letter.

"Let me tell you about it first. After leaving you this morning, I went to the morgue and saw the body. You were right; it is Arbogast's. I had been only half convinced by your evidence; but I now saw that you were probably right in all your other inductions, and I became anxious to learn something definite concerning the amount of Arbogast's defalcation. As I could not reach the books for some time, I called upon Mrs. Arbogast, thinking I might be able to learn something from her. You had not been to see her, had you?"

"No," answered Sturgis gravely, "I did not think it likely she knew as much about this matter as we do, and I shrank from the ordeal of revealing to her the fact of her husband's crime

and tragic death. I wished, at any rate, to exhaust all other means of obtaining information before resorting to this one."

"Of course, of course," said Dunlap somewhat impatiently; "the woman is naturally to be pitied; but I could not allow any sentimental consideration to stand in the way of the discharge of my duty to our depositors."

"What did you learn from her?" asked the reporter.

"When I reached the house the maid told me that Mrs. Arbogast had spent the previous evening at her sister's house in the country and had not yet come back. I was about to leave, intending to return later in the evening, when the lady herself arrived. Upon learning who I was she seemed somewhat surprised but invited me in. As we passed into the parlor the maid handed her mistress a letter, stating that it had come by the morning's mail. Mrs. Arbogast glanced at the envelope but did not open it. At my first cautious questions she seemed to be very much surprised. Arbogast had announced to her by telegram the previous day that he would be obliged to go out of town for a few days on business. He allowed her to infer that he would soon

return, and that his business was connected with the affairs of the bank. She could not understand how it happened that I knew nothing of this trip. 'But,' said she, 'I have just received a letter from him, which will, doubtless, explain matters.' She evidently knew nothing of her husband's peculation. Thereupon, she opened the envelope and took out this letter. I observed her closely. At the first words I saw her cheeks blanch and a look of agony pass over her features as she instinctively pressed her hand to her heart. I knew then that the letter contained some important revelation, and I became anxious to obtain possession of it. When she had done I could see that she was laboring under a strong emotion; but she controlled herself, replaced the letter in its envelope, and said merely: 'This does not tell me my husband's whereabouts; but I shall doubtless have further news of him in the course of a few days.' I saw that she was attempting to shield him in the supposition that he was still alive. I therefore broke the news of his death to her as gently as I could. The first shock seemed to utterly unnerve her; but after awhile she became somewhat calmer. 'After all, it is better so,' she said, at last. Then she

handed me this letter. There was no further reason for withholding it. Read it now."

"It is postmarked at the general post-office at five o'clock," said Sturgis; "it was therefore mailed before or during Chatham's visit to the bank. It may have been mailed by Arbogast before the scrubbing was done, or perhaps by the chorewoman when she left the bank."

The reporter drew the letter from its envelope and read:

"THE KNICKERBOCKER BANK,

"NEW YORK, December 31, 1896.

"MY DARLING WIFE,

"When you receive this letter I shall be far away—a disgraced criminal—and you will be worse than a widow.

"I dare not ask your forgiveness for the trouble I am bringing upon you; for I realize all too clearly the extent of the wrong I have done you. But I feel irresistibly impelled to lay before you in all their nakedness, as I do before my own conscience, the circumstances which have led to my downfall. A knowledge of these may perhaps enable you to understand, in a measure, the temptation to which I have succumbed; although

I find it hard myself, now that all is over, to realize how I came to yield to it.

“Perhaps you may remember the celebration of my fiftieth anniversary. We were having a most enjoyable evening in the company of the friends whom you had invited to participate in the festivities, when a caller was announced. I was obliged to leave our guests in order to receive him in the library. This man lost no time in stating the nature of his business with me. His name was Thomas Chatham ; he was an expert accountant, who had been employed at the Knickerbocker bank to examine the books, and he coolly informed me that he had just discovered a serious error in my books—one that had enabled a depositor to overdraw his account by a large amount. At first I refused to believe him, although he submitted copies from the books showing exactly how the blunder had been made. When he intimated that it only rested with me whether the error should be reported to the bank, I indignantly refused to listen to him. He remained perfectly unruffled during our interview and left me at last with the statement that he would wait twenty-four hours before handing in his report to the president.

"My first step on reaching the bank the next day was to verify Chatham's statements. Alas! they were only too true. There was the terrible blunder staring me in the face. I could not understand how I had come to make it; but there it was, and nothing could explain it away. I had hoped against hope up to this time; now I saw clearly that I was a ruined man.

"There was only one honorable course open to me—to frankly confess my responsibility for the blunder and take the consequences, whatever they might be. I hesitated, and I was lost.

"I hesitated because I felt that my position was at stake. Would not my error appear inexcusable to the officers of the bank, since I could find no palliation for it in my own eyes. I was fifty years old. I shrank from the necessity of beginning again at the foot of the ladder which I had so laboriously climbed after a lifetime of conscientious plodding. It would be no easy matter for me to find another position.

"The more I thought the matter over, the more I became convinced that there might be another way out of my trouble. Was it not probable that the depositor who had profited by my mistake, had done so innocently? If so, would he

not be willing to repay the amount overdrawn? At the worst, if he should refuse to do this, might it not be possible for me to scrape together and borrow enough to make good the deficiency? In this way I could correct the blunder and no one would be the wiser for it. But what of that man Chatham? Would not his report betray me? I recalled his intimation that the nature of his report depended upon myself. What did he mean by that? Probably he would set a price upon his silence. This would add considerably to the amount I should have to raise; but would not this be better, after all, than the loss of my position. At any rate, I should not be any the worse off for listening to his proposal, whatever it might be.

“That afternoon, as soon as the bank had closed, I called at the address Chatham had given me. He evidently expected me. With him was a man whom he introduced as James Withers, the depositor in whose favor my blunder had been made. Had I not been laboring under great excitement, it is likely that my suspicions would have been aroused by the strangeness of Withers’ presence in Chatham’s room. The two men received me pleasantly, and the alleged Withers,

even before I could broach the subject, expressed his regret at hearing of the error which had been committed, and assured me of his willingness to re-imburse the bank; but——ah! there was an ominous 'but.' He was short of ready money just then; everything he had was tied up in a promising enterprise which was bound to bring in a magnificent profit in the course of a few days, if only he could raise a few paltry hundreds to enable him to hold out a little longer. If he failed to scrape together this small amount, all would be lost. Insidiously and relentlessly they drove me toward the trap they had prepared, and I was weak enough to fall into it. Before the interview was over, I had consented to allow Withers to still further overdraw his account, and I had received his solemn promise to refund, before the end of the week, the entire amount he owed the bank. Then Chatham suggested that it would be wiser to let the second overdraft come from another account. Withers agreed with him, and stated that the check could be made out in the name of Henry Seymour, a relative of his, who had recently opened a small account with the Knickerbocker bank. I strongly objected to sharing the secret of my infamy with

any others ; but I finally allowed myself to be overruled by the plausible scoundrels into whose clutches I had fallen.

“ The next day I took my first step in crime, by making such entries as would insure the honoring of Seymour’s check. After that I was completely in the power of these two men. It was not long before I discovered that I had been their dupe. Chatham’s accomplice was not the true Withers ; for this man, a few days later, made a large deposit, which more than covered his previous overdraft. The false Withers was Henry Seymour himself.

“ As soon as I had committed a felony, it became unnecessary for Seymour to keep up any further pretense of a desire to refund the money I had helped him steal. I was now in the meshes of crime as deeply as my accomplices ; and, from that time to this, they have forced me to act as their catspaw. During this period of two years the bank has been robbed in this way of over \$250,000.00, every cent of which has gone to Chatham and Seymour.

“ You can perhaps imagine what a hell my life has been during that time. With prison and disgrace staring me in the face ; and with the abso-

lute conviction that exposure must inevitably come sooner or later, I have suffered the tortures of the damned. At the bank, I have been in a perpetual state of suspense. I have started at every word spoken to me; I have seen suspicion in every glance which has met mine; I have trembled and paled at every approach of one of the officers of the bank. And yet I have not dared to absent myself from my desk for an hour, lest an examination of my books during my absence should reveal my crime. I have been the first to reach the bank in the morning and the last to leave it at night; I have not even taken the few minutes during the day which would have been required to enable me to obtain a hurried meal. On one pretext or another, during the last two years, I have had to forego my annual vacation. I have dragged myself to my post when I was so ill that I could hardly stand, because I could not afford to have any one take charge of my books for even an hour. And all that time, with a full realization of my degradation and infamy, I have been forced to continue my frauds, knowing that each one brought me nearer to the inevitable final exposure; but knowing equally well that a refusal on my part to con-

tinue my stealings would result in an instant betrayal by my accomplices.

"At last further concealment became impossible. A week ago the yearly examination of the books took place. The expert accountant employed was, as usual, Thomas Chatham, and of course, as usual, his report was entirely satisfactory. It seemed, therefore, as though discovery could be postponed a little longer; when suddenly, this morning, we were informed that a change in the system of bookkeeping would be adopted after the first of January. I saw at once that all was over. The discovery of my crime is now a matter of hours. I must be out of the way before the crash comes or I am doomed. I can already see the felon's stripes upon my back; the clang of the prison gates rings in my ears.

"I am too dazed to think; but I feel that my only escape is in death. And yet I cling to life. I know that the happy days of the past are gone forever; and yet I feel a sort of numb relief at the thought that the worst is now certain to come, and to come at once.

"I have carefully prepared my flight, so that I shall have plenty of time to reach a place of

safety. Once there, I shall be free from pursuit ; but I shall be an exile, and I shall carry with me to the grave the burden of my sin.

"The most bitter pang in my remorse is caused by the thought of the great wrong I have done you, dear wife. You will now be forced to face the world not only unprotected by the one whose duty and whose desire it was to smooth the way for you ; but, what is worse, oppressed by the burden of his sin.

"What little money I have left in the savings bank I have transferred to your name. You may use it all with a clear conscience ; for every dollar of it was honestly mine. I swear I have never had a single cent of the money I have stolen. It has all been drawn by Henry Seymour, and used I know not how.

"As soon as I am settled in the place to which I am going, I shall try, as far as lies in my power, to redeem my past by a life of honest labor ; and I hope to be able to contribute to your support in the near future.

"Oh ! my wife ! my darling wife ! Would that the past could be blotted out, and that I could once more place my hand in yours, an honest man. Though you may find it hard to forgive

me now, perhaps in time you may be able to think gently of him who through all his crime and degradation, has remained

“Your devoted husband,

“JOHN W. ARBOGAST.

“My safety depends upon your keeping the contents of this letter secret for at least three days. After that time, please send to Mr. Dunlap, president of the Knickerbocker bank, the inclosed papers, which will reveal to him the full extent of my defalcations.

“I do not hesitate to betray Chatham and Seymour; they did not scruple to ruin me. I have sent for Chatham, and I shall give him warning of my intended flight. If he sees fit, he can take such steps as he may choose to escape his own richly deserved punishment.”

While Sturgis was reading Arbogast's letter, Dunlap, restlessly pacing the room, had observed him furtively.

“Well?” he now inquired, stopping before the reporter; “what do you think of that?”

“Poor woman!” exclaimed Sturgis feelingly; “it is terrible to think of the suffering brought

upon her by her husband's guilt. I ought to be hardened to a situation like this ; for it is the inevitable sequel of almost every crime that is ever committed. But I am moved every time by the pathetic expiation of the innocent for the guilty."

"Yes, yes ; I know," said Dunlap indifferently ; "that is not what I meant. Did you note the amount which this scoundrel confesses he and his accomplices have stolen from the bank?"

"Yes ; it is a large sum."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars ! Why, man, if that is true, it is enough to cripple the bank—No, no ; I don't mean that, of course ; the bank is rich and could stand the loss of four times that amount. But a quarter of a million is a round sum, for all that. It does not seem possible that, in spite of all our care, they can have succeeded in making away with so much money. But they did. There can be no doubt about that ; for in the papers which Arbogast inclosed for me in his letter to his wife he explains just how the thing was done. It is simple enough when you know the trick ; but it took fiendish cunning to devise it. I never would have thought that rascally bookkeeper intelligent enough to concoct such a scheme."

"If the scheme is a work of genius," said Sturgis, "you may rest assured that 'X'—who may very well be Henry Seymour—was the author of it."

"Well, at any rate," observed Dunlap, "there is one thing that must be done at once; and that is to find both Chatham and Seymour. It is not possible that in two years these men have spent a quarter of a million dollars between them."

"It is at all events possible that they may not have done so," replied Sturgis, "for my investigations show that both Arbogast and Chatham have been men of regular and exemplary habits in their private lives. They do not appear to have been living much, if at all, beyond their means. There does not seem to have been, in the case of either man, any room for a double existence, which might otherwise have explained the situation. Neither was a spendthrift nor a gambler, and neither was dissipated."

"Then you have not the faintest idea of the present whereabouts of Chatham or of his mysterious accomplice?"

"Let me tell you exactly what I have done up to the present time; and then you will be able

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to judge for yourself. And I, too, shall see more clearly where we stand; for the necessity of putting one's thoughts into words is an aid to clear thinking."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST TRAIL.

SO saying, Sturgis settled himself in his chair and began his narrative.

"After leaving you this morning, my first step was to gain admission to the Tombs——"

"To the Tombs?" interrupted Dunlap.

"Yes; the cabman has been remanded to the Tombs to await trial for complicity in the murder of the unknown man whose body was found in his cab."

"Arbogast's?"

"Yes, Arbogast's. But of course the police do not yet know that."

"Were you allowed to see the cabman?"

"Yes. As reporter of *The Tempest*, I was able to obtain an interview with him. When first arrested, the man, whose name, by the way, is Reilly, was incapable of making a connected statement; the lawyer assigned to defend him laughed

in his face when he heard his story, and advised him to leave the romancing to a trained lawyer as his only chance of escaping the electric chair. Naturally, under the circumstances, the poor fellow hesitated to unbosom himself to a stranger. But I finally managed to gain his confidence by showing him that I believed his story, and that I was trying to find the men whose scapegoat he now is. It seems that yesterday afternoon, at about three o'clock, he was stationed at the cabstand in front of Madison Square, when he was accosted by a man, answering Chatham's description, who engaged him to drive him to the Fulton Street ferry. On reaching the ferry, the man ordered Reilly to proceed to a low grogshop on South Street. Here he entered, returning in a few minutes to invite the cabman to take a drink with him. The men seated themselves at a table upon which a bottle and two filled glasses were already placed. Chatham handed one of these glasses to Reilly, who drank it and probably many more. At all events, he remembers nothing further until he was rudely shaken by Chatham, who led him out into the street. Here the cold air revived him, and he remembers noticing several things to which he did not pay

much attention at the time, but which seem significant now as he recalls them :

“ Firstly,—It was now quite dark.

“ Secondly,—The cab, which had been facing south when he entered the barroom, was now facing north.

“ Thirdly,—Chatham persistently carried his left hand in the bosom of his coat ; he was very pale and seemed weak and ill.

“ He with difficulty climbed upon the box beside Reilly and ordered him to drive uptown. Presently the cabman became drowsy again. The next thing he remembers is coming to himself after the overturning of the cab by the cable car. That the man was drugged there can be no doubt. It is probable that while he sat apparently drunk in the barroom, Chatham took the cab to the Knickerbocker bank, expecting to smuggle Arbogast into it without Reilly’s knowledge ;—a deep move, since it would effectually cover up the trail, if they wanted to make away with the bookkeeper, as they evidently did. Seymour may have met him at the bank by appointment ; but I am more inclined to believe that he was there unknown to Chatham, and possibly for the purpose of spying upon the

latter, to see that his instructions were carried out. He lent his accomplice a hand in the nick of time; and then, like a prudent general, he retired to a safe position, thence to direct further operations. What I cannot yet understand is, why Chatham should have taken the enormous risk he did in conveying Arbogast's body from the bank, since Seymour's intention was plainly to make away with the bookkeeper in any event. I can explain this only on the supposition that Seymour thought he could conceal the body in some way and prevent it from falling into the hands of the police. On the part of any ordinary criminal this would have been rank folly; but the resources of such a man as Seymour are such that I do not feel disposed to criticize his generalship in this particular without first understanding his ultimate object. From what I have seen of his work thus far, I have derived a profound admiration for the man's genius and cunning deviltry. Fortunately, fate was against him this time. Its instrument was the cable car which overturned the cab, thus delivering Arbogast's body into the hands of the police and furnishing the key without which, it is quite likely, Seymour might have remained forever undiscovered."

"You think, then, that you will succeed in unearthing this villain?" asked Dunlap eagerly.

"While there's life, there's hope," said Sturgis, with grim determination; "but I must confess that the outlook at present is not exactly brilliant. However, let me finish my report. During the excitement that followed the overturning of the cab, Chatham managed to escape, as you know, and he has thus far succeeded in avoiding arrest, although the police have kept a sharp lookout for him. Every steamship that sails, every train that leaves New York, is watched, but thus far without result. For my part, I am convinced that Chatham has not yet attempted to leave the city."

"Isn't it probable, on the contrary, that he fled from New York immediately after running away from the overturned cab?" asked Dunlap.

"I do not think so," replied Sturgis; "with his wounded hand he is a marked man; he would be easily recognized in a strange city. His safest hiding-place is here in New York, where he doubtless has friends ready to conceal him. Be that as it may, he remains for the present under cover and the scent is lost. The police are

groping in the dark just now, and,—and so am I.”

The banker looked sorely disappointed.

“And so that is all you have been able to discover? Not a trace of the money? It does not seem possible that a quarter of a million dollars can disappear so completely without leaving the slightest trace.”

“If we can ever find Seymour,” replied Sturgis, “I make no doubt we shall be able to locate the lion’s share of the money.

“Yes,” he added, thoughtfully, “that is all I have been able to discover up to the present time; or, at least, all that seems to be of any immediate importance. Of course, I called on both Mr. Murray and Mr. Scott; but, beyond the fact that Chatham, like Arbogast, was a model employé, all I got from them was the address of Chatham’s boarding-house; there I was informed that the accountant had moved on New Year’s eve without leaving his new address. There is one other link in the chain of evidence which I have investigated; but I cannot tell yet whether it will lead to anything or not. It may be immaterial; but who knows? Possibly it may prove to be the key to the entire problem.”

"And what is this promising link?" asked Dunlap eagerly.

"There is not much to tell on this score," answered Sturgis. "You will recall that according to the evidence which we have thus far collected, Chatham was attacked by Arbogast while he was in the act of using the telephone."

"Yes; I remember how minutely you reconstructed that scene."

"Well," continued the reporter, "I saw at once that the telephone might possibly prove to be an important witness for the prosecution, if I could only discover the name of the person with whom Chatham was talking when he was shot. I therefore called at the Central Office to make inquiries. As I was able to specify almost the exact minute at which this call was sent, it was an easy matter to find the young woman who had answered it; but the chances were that she would not remember the number called for. She did, however, for it had been fixed in her memory by some unusual circumstances. It seems that after giving Chatham the connection he wanted, the operator rang him up. While she was listening for a reply, she heard a sharp report, followed by a scream; then a sound of confused voices,

and presently another sharp report. After that came complete silence, and she was unable to obtain any reply to her repeated calls."

"You have here corroborative evidence of the scene between Chatham and Arbogast," said Dunlap.

"Yes; but I did not need that. What I wished to know was the name of the person with whom Chatham wanted to converse."

"Did you discover it?"

"The number of the telephone he gave is that of the Manhattan Chemical Company."

"And what is the Manhattan Chemical Company?"

"That is the question I asked people connected with the commercial agencies. They replied that they knew very little concerning this firm; because, although it has been in existence for a couple of years, it apparently never asks any one for credit, preferring to pay cash for all the goods delivered to it. I called at the office of the Manhattan Chemical Company to investigate on my own account. The office and store occupy the basement of an old ramshackle building, whose upper stories are rented out as business offices. The laboratory and manufacturing de-

partment are down stairs in the cellar. The store contains only a few chairs and a long counter behind which rise shelves containing rows of bottles with brilliantly colored labels. A few painted signs upon the walls vaunt the merits of Dr. Henderson's Cough Cure and Dr. Henderson's Liver Specific. I did not expect to find any one in on New Year's day. I was, therefore, surprised to see a solitary clerk sitting with his feet upon a desk and apparently absorbed in the reading of a newspaper,—a pale young man of the washed-out blond type, with watery green-blue eyes and a scant moustache which fails to conceal a weak mouth. He rose to greet me with an air of surprise which does not speak well for the briskness of trade in the establishment. Indeed, if we are to judge by the aspect of things in the office of the Manhattan Chemical Company, business in patent medicines does not appear to be flourishing just at present. By the way, did you ever hear of Dr. Henderson's remedies?"

"No; I cannot say that I have," answered Dunlap.

"That is the curious part of it," said Sturgis. "I have been unable to discover any advertise-

ment published by this firm ; and it is only by profuse advertising that such a concern can live."

"Yes, of course," exclaimed Dunlap, somewhat impatiently ; "but what has all this to do with Chatham?"

"I don't know," replied Sturgis ; "possibly nothing ; perhaps a great deal."

"I asked to see Dr. Henderson," he continued, "at which the sleepy clerk stared at me in open-mouthed amazement. Dr. Henderson was not in ; it was quite uncertain when he would be in. Indeed, as far as I was able to judge, Dr. Henderson appears to be a rather mysterious personage. No one knows much about him. Even his clerk admits that he has seen him only once or twice in the eighteen months during which he has had charge of the office. The Doctor attends to the manufacturing part of the business himself ; his laboratory, which is down in the cellar, is a most jealously guarded place. No one is ever admitted to it under any pretext. He is evidently afraid that some one may discover the secret of his valuable remedies."

"You say that as if your words were meant to convey some unexpressed meaning," said Dunlap, studying the reporter's face.

"No," Sturgis answered, thoughtfully, "but I am trying to attach some ulterior significance to the facts. There is certainly something mysterious about Dr. Henderson and the Manhattan Chemical Company; but whether the mystery is legitimate or not, and if not, whether it is in any way connected with the Arbogast case, is more than I am at present able to determine."

After a short pause he continued:

"When I found that there was no chance of seeing Dr. Henderson himself, I inquired at a venture for the manager. For an instant a puzzled look lent expression to the otherwise vacuous features of the young man. Then a sudden inspiration seemed to come to him. 'Oh! ah! yes,' he exclaimed, 'you mean Mr. Smith.' 'Yes,' said I, catching at the straw. 'Well, but Mr. Smith is not in either.' I offered to wait for Mr. Smith, and started toward the door of the private office in the rear, because it bore in prominent letters the inscription, 'NO ADMITTANCE.' I had turned the knob before the clerk could stop me; but the door was locked. Mr. Smith, it seems, comes to the office only once a week to receive the clerk's report and to pay him his salary. I tried to make a special ap-

pointment to meet Mr. Smith, on the plea of important business. I left a fictitious name and address so that Mr. Smith's answer might be sent to me. That was all I was able to do for the time being; but I thought it worth while to keep an eye open on the Manhattan Chemical Company; so I have engaged private detectives to watch it for me night and day until further notice. And there the matter stands."

Dunlap rose wearily from his chair. He looked anxious and careworn.

"Mr. Sturgis," he said, "if you can find any part of that two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, a good share of whatever you can recover for the bank is yours."

The reporter flushed and bit his lip; but he answered quietly :

"You mistake me for a detective, Mr. Dunlap; I am only a reporter. I shall be paid by the *Tempest* for any work I may do on this case. You would better offer your reward to the police."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTER.

THERE is a magic in the refreshing sleep of youth, calculated to exorcise the megrims. When Sprague, arising after a good night's rest, found the world bathed in the sunshine of a crisp January day, he felt the physical pleasure of living which comes from supple muscles, from the coursing of a generous blood through the veins, from the cravings of a healthy appetite.

He remembered the "blue devils" of the day before, and found it difficult to account for them. He was in love, certainly. But that in itself did not furnish a sufficient reason for despondency. It was rumored that the object of his affections was on the eve of betrothal to another. But what dependence can be placed upon a public rumor? As a matter of fact, Miss Murdock wore no rings; in the absence of the badge of the betrothed woman, was he not justified in believing her fancy free?

In that case, there was a fair field and no favor. Why should not he have as good a chance of winning the prize as another man? No man, of course, was worthy of Agnes Murdock. That was the fundamental axiom. But in love success does not perch only upon the banner of the worthy. If it did, the human race would soon become extinct.

So the young man's thoughts ran on, while hope once more found a resting place in his heart.

Miss Murdock was not to pose again, but Sprague was eager to work on the portrait. He was about to step into the studio after breakfast, when the housekeeper announced a call from his lawyer, who wished to consult him about some important matters. The entire morning was thus consumed in necessary but tedious business, and it was not until after luncheon that the artist was at last free to set to work.

Uncovering the portrait, he stood off to examine it. As he did so, something white upon the floor caught his eye. He stooped to pick it up. It was a letter in a beautifully regular masculine hand. Mechanically he turned it over and unfolded it. His eyes carelessly swept the writ-

ten page ; then in a flash he realized what it was, and he flung it violently from him.

Only a few words had left their impress upon his retina—a few scattered words and a signature. But these were branded deep upon his brain for all time, in letters of fire which burned their way to his very soul. For he had recognized the letter which had been delivered by the messenger to Miss Murdock the day before, and he had seen enough to know that it was couched in words of passionate love. In that instant was quenched the last ray of hope which had lurked within his heart. Overwhelmed with a sense of utter desolation, he sank back upon a divan ; and for a long time remained lost in bitter reflections.

But Sprague, in spite of his dilettanteism, was a man of grit when occasion called for it. Summoning at length his fortitude and his pride, he proceeded to carry out what he conceived to be the duty of a gentleman under the circumstances.

Picking up the letter again, he placed it unread in an envelope, into which he slipped his card, with a brief explanation of the finding of the paper. Then, after addressing the envelope, he started out to mail it himself.

"Thomas Chatham!" he mused, as he went down the stairs; "Thomas Chatham! Why, he is the man who took such pains to inform me that Miss Murdock was betrothed, or on the point of being betrothed,—the flashily dressed young man with red hair who is so regular an attendant at the Murdocks' informal receptions, and who never seems to be invited on state occasions; an insignificant and conceited puppy. Poor girl, what a pity that she should throw herself away upon such a man. But if he marries her, he shall make her happy, or else——"

The balance of his thought was not put into words; but his face became set in stern lines and his hands clenched in grim determination.

Sprague, with the letter for Miss Murdock in his hand, hurried to the nearest letter-box, raised the lid of the drop, inserted the letter in the slot and then tightened his grasp of it and began to think.

The letter, if mailed, might perhaps not reach its destination until the following morning. It might be of importance, since it had been sent by messenger and to the studio instead of to Miss Murdock's house. Besides, Miss Murdock would

probably be worried when she discovered that she had lost it. It ought therefore to be returned to her at once.

The letter, by this time, had been withdrawn from the slot of the letter-box.

Yes, it ought to be returned by messenger instead of by mail. By messenger? It was about half a mile to the nearest district-messenger office. The Murdocks' house was not much further. Why not deliver the letter himself?

Why not, indeed? The human heart has unfathomable depths. Why should a hopeless lover pine for a mere sight of the woman whose presence only adds to his misery? Explain that who can.

Sprague carefully placed the letter in his breast pocket and started off again, this time directing his steps toward the Murdocks' home.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO LOVERS.

MISS MURDOCK was seated at the piano in the drawing-room, her shapely fingers wandering dreamily over the keys, when a servant knocked at the door.

"A gintleman to see yer, Miss," said the maid.

"A caller!" exclaimed Agnes in surprise. "At this time of day? Did he give you his card?"

"No, miss. Nor his name nayther."

"Well then, Mary," said Agnes, with a mixture of amusement and severity, "why do you announce him? I think you would better keep an eye on the hat-rack."

"He aint no thafe, Miss," said the maid, positively; "he do be dressed up too foine fur that. Besoides, Oi've sane him here before. A hansum young feller wid rid hair—Mister—Mister—Cha—Chapman."

"Chatham!" suggested Agnes, with sudden seriousness.

"Yis, Miss; it do be the same."

"I cannot receive him," said Miss Murdock in frigid tones. "I am surprised that John should have admitted him, after the explicit instructions I gave him yesterday. Hereafter I am never at home to Mr. Chatham."

"Your butler is not at fault in this instance," said a voice from the hallway, and before either of the women could recover from her surprise, a flashily dressed young man with intensely red hair entered the room. He carried his left arm in a sling. His face was pale; his eyes glittered with a feverish light; his voice quivered with repressed excitement.

"I was waiting for your father in his office, when I heard your maid go by, and I asked her to announce me. I hoped for, but I can hardly say I expected, a more hospitable reception."

Miss Murdock, after the first shock of surprise, had drawn up her graceful figure to its full height, and stood looking at the young man with undisguised contempt in her flashing eyes.

Chatham paused as if expecting a reply; and then:

"Shall I explain the object of my visit before your servant?" he asked bitterly.

"You may leave, Mary, until I ring for you," said the young girl, turning to the maid.

The woman reluctantly left the room, casting curious glances upon her young mistress and her unwelcome guest as she went.

Chatham made a motion as if to take a chair; but Agnes remained significantly standing.

"Perhaps," she said coldly, "you will be good enough to explain as briefly as possible your object in forcing your presence upon me in this gentlemanly way?"

"I suppose my conduct does strike you as ungentlemanly," said the young man piteously; "but what could I do? I love you devotedly, madly, and you will not allow me even to tell you so. You instruct your servants to turn me away from the door like a beggar. Is it a crime to love you?"

"No, Mr. Chatham," said the girl more gently, "it is not a crime to love a woman; but it is at least a serious blunder to adopt the method you have selected of showing your affection, and it is certainly not generous to force it upon her as you are doing."

"What else can I do?" he repeated doggedly. "Here am I suddenly obliged to leave New York for a long time,—perhaps for ever,—and unable to get a single word with you. I called yesterday morning and was informed that you were at that artist fellow's studio. Then I wrote you a letter asking for an interview and I left it there for you myself. The only notice you took of it was to give instructions to your butler not to admit me if I called again. I cannot go away like that, without a ray of hope to lighten my exile, and leave you here surrounded by a lot of men who are anxious to marry you."

The tender-hearted girl felt a growing pity for the awkward and vulgar young man in whom she began vaguely to discern a genuine suffering.

"I am sorry, Mr. Chatham," she said, "more sorry than I can say. But what can I do? I do not care for you in the way you wish, and affection is not to be coerced. I have done the best I could to discourage you, because——"

"I know you have," interrupted Chatham; "you have avoided me, and snubbed me, and taken every way you could to show that you do not like me."

"It would have been mistaken kindness to do otherwise," said Agnes gently.

"No, it wouldn't," exclaimed the accountant ; "I don't ask you to love me ; not at once, at any rate. But give me a show ; give me time ; give me a little hope——"

"I cannot do that," said the girl in a low tone.

"Why can't you?" urged the young man excitedly. "I have sacrificed everything for you ; I have given up all I had ; I have lost my position ; I have risked my life——"

"I don't understand you," said Miss Murdock, looking at him in astonishment.

"Your father would," he replied huskily ; "it was he egged me on to this ; he promised me that you would have me——"

"My father promised——"

"Yes, your father ; and by G——"

Chatham, who was growing more and more excited, brought down his clenched fist upon a table near which he stood, and with an evident effort repressed the oath which rose to his lips. Miss Murdock, startled and bewildered, observed him in speechless amazement.

After a momentary struggle, the accountant suddenly broke forth in piteous pleading :

"I don't ask much now. Tell me only one thing and I shall go away content for the present. Say that no other man has any better chance with you than I have. Say that you do not love any one else."

The young girl tried to avoid his ardent gaze.

"Say it!" he commanded in sudden sternness.

Agnes drew herself up proudly then.

"I don't know by what right you presume to catechize or to command me," she said coldly, at the same time making a motion as if to touch the button of the electric bell.

Chatham saw the motion and sprang before her to intercept it.

"Ah! that is the way of it, is it?" he exclaimed with passionate jealousy. "You are—in love—with another man!"

The words seemed to choke him in the utterance. The blood rushed to his head; the veins on his temples stood out in purple vividness, and, as he clutched spasmodically at his collar, a wild light came into his eyes.

Agnes caught their mad glitter and shrank back in sudden terror.

"I have been duped!" he shouted frantically. "I have been a catspaw, and now that I have

done all that was wanted of me, I am to be turned off like a dog, with a kick. The dirty work is done, is it? We'll see about that; we'll see what your father has to say. But, at any rate, you can be sure of one thing."

His voice sank to a hoarse whisper, and the words fell with impressive distinctness:

"If I don't marry you, no one ever shall!"

As he spoke he leaned forward upon the table which stood near him, and his fingers closed nervously upon the handle of a jeweled paper knife. There was murder in his eye at that moment, and the frightened girl quailed before it.

Suddenly her ear caught the sound of footsteps in the hallway. She opened her lips to call for help, but before she could utter a sound the door opened, revealing the anxious face of the housemaid, who had heard enough to realize that it was time to interrupt the tête-à-tête without further ceremony.

"Mister Sprague, Miss," she announced, with a comforting nod at her young mistress, whose pale face and frightened eyes had not escaped her attention.

Sprague stood on the threshold in evident em-

barrassment, looking from Agnes to Chatham, and uncertain how to act.

"I fear I am intruding, Miss Murdock," he said at last; "your maid told me she thought you could receive me. Perhaps I would better call again."

"No, no, Mr. Sprague," replied the young girl effusively, coming toward him with outstretched hands; "I am so glad to see you."

And then, observing his inquiring glance toward Chatham,

"I think," she added coldly, "that this gentleman has said all that he has to say to me."

Chatham's excitement had subsided; in the reaction, he seemed ill and weak as he nervously clenched his tremulous right hand.

"I will wait to see Doctor Murdock," he said doggedly in a low voice.

"As you please," replied Agnes after a slight hesitation. "Mary, show Mr. Chatham to the Doctor's study."

As the accountant followed the servant from the room, blank despair was stamped in every feature, and it seemed to Sprague, as the door closed, that he heard something like a convulsive sob.

Unconsciously Agnes had clung to Sprague's hand. Now, as the sense of danger disappeared, she became aware of what she was doing; and, in sudden embarrassment, she withdrew her hand from his reassuring clasp.

The artist, recalling the object of his visit, at once became grave and formal.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you at this unconventional hour, Miss Murdock, but I found this letter in my studio to-day. It was evidently dropped by you yesterday; and, thinking it might be important, I——"

"A letter? What letter?" asked Agnes, puzzled.

Sprague held out the sealed envelope. The young girl tore it open and cast a hurried glance at its contents. Then suddenly understanding, she tore the paper to shreds, and threw these angrily into the fire which burned brightly in the large open fire-place.

"Oh, that!" she exclaimed contemptuously. And then after a pause:

"Do you mean to say you thought——?"

She stopped short, seized by a sudden shyness.

"What else could I think?" said Sprague softly.

He was watching the fragments of paper as they flared upon the hearth. The flame which consumed them seemed to shed a radiant glow upon his heart.

"Then," he added presently and still more softly, "if there is nothing between you and—and him—perhaps—perhaps I may hope—Miss Murdock—Agnes——"

His hand sought hers and found it.

But the reaction had come at last, and the brave girl who had been able to control herself in the presence of a threatening madman now gave way to a fit of hysterical weeping.

Sprague, not being a medical man, could hardly have known what remedies to employ in an emergency of this kind. All he did was to whisper soothing words in the young girl's ear and to kiss the tears from her eyes. But apparently that was enough. Evidently for a layman he must have possessed considerable medical intuition; for, after sobbing a while upon his shoulder, Agnes quieted down gradually and remained contentedly nestling in his arms, while the artist, doubtless fearful of a relapse, continued, for perhaps an unnecessarily long time, to ply the treatment whose effect had produced

upon his patient so marked, so rapid, and so satisfactory a result.

The attention of the medical profession is respectfully called to a treatment which, though empirical, may possibly possess specific virtues.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROENTGEN RAYS.

"I TELL you, Sturgis, it is a wonderful discovery. I don't know what applications may ultimately be made of it in other branches of science ; but I am convinced that it is bound to cause a revolution in surgical diagnosis," said Doctor Thurston enthusiastically.

"Yes," replied Sturgis, "I have no doubt that Roentgen's rays will be of great assistance to the surgeon in the examination of fractures and in the location of foreign bodies which cannot be reached by the probe."

"As a proof of that, I must show you a beautiful photograph which I have just made. After leaving you on New Year's morning, I found a patient asleep in my office. He had been waiting several hours. It was the usual case of a pistol in the hands of a fool friend, who did not know it was loaded ; and of course with the usual result—a bullet wound in my patient."

Sturgis was listening in an absent-minded way while his friend spoke.

"The wound was not severe ; no bones broken. The bullet had entered the palm of the left hand and had passed up into the forearm."

A sudden light came into the reporter's eyes ; but he maintained his listless attitude.

"Well, sir, probe as I would, I was unable to locate that bullet. At last I concluded to try the Roentgen rays, and here is the result. It is as pretty a shadow photograph as I have yet seen."

So saying, Doctor Thurston handed the reporter a photograph, which the latter studied carefully in silence.

"Notice how clearly you can see the peculiar shape into which the bullet has been flattened," said the physician.

"Yes," replied Sturgis, "I was observing that. Have you a duplicate of this that you can spare?"

"Yes ; keep that one if you wish."

"Thank you ; I am very glad to have it. Did you succeed in extracting the bullet?"

"I have not tried yet. I had to develop the photograph first."

"Of course. When do you expect the red-haired young man to return?"

"He promised to come back yesterday, but he failed to do so," replied Doctor Thurston. Then suddenly :

"But who said anything about his being young or red-haired?"

"Not you certainly, old man," replied Sturgis, smiling. "Don't worry ; you have not voluntarily betrayed any professional secret. But, for all that, your patient is wanted by the police. He was bound to fall into their hands before long. The only effect of this discovery will be to hasten the dénouement. I had traced him to your house, and I knew how he was wounded ; so that I recognized him as soon as you mentioned his case."

"Who is he?" asked Thurston. "I am sure I have seen him somewhere before ; but I cannot remember where."

Whereupon the reporter related the story of Chatham's connection with the Knickerbocker bank case.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE QUARRY.

HALF an hour later, Sturgis was walking briskly down Broadway, with his usual air of absent-minded concentration. Presently he turned into a side street and at once slackened his pace. He now sauntered along like a loungeur at a loss how to kill a long idle day. The show window of a bric-à-brac shop arrested his attention. He stopped to examine its contents.

A little farther up the street was a liquor saloon, outside of which stood a group of boisterous young rowdies. An older man, evidently in his cups, was seated on an adjoining stoop, where, with maudlin gravity, he seemed to be communing with himself.

On the opposite side of the way stood a low, dilapidated brick house. A painted sign over the windows of the ground floor bore the name, "MANHATTAN CHEMICAL CO."

The drunken man rose unsteadily to his feet and approached Sturgis with outstretched hand.

"Say, Jimmy, get on ter his nibs strikin' de bloke fur a nickel ter git med'cine fur his sick mudder," exclaimed one of the young ruffians.

The wretched-looking individual thus designated seemed hardly able to stand as he steadied himself against an iron railing; but the eyes he turned upon Sturgis were bright with intelligence, and the words he spoke were uttered in a low, firm voice.

"He's been here—been here twice."

"Twice?" echoed Sturgis, surprised. "Where is he now?"

"I don't know——"

"You don't know?"

"No, sir; but I guess Conklin does. This is how it is: It was my watch yesterday afternoon when Chatham came the first time. He went into the Manhattan Company's place through the basement at a quarter after five. So I just settled myself out here and waited. Well, I waited and waited, but there wasn't any sign of Chatham, and when Flagler came along to relieve me at ten o'clock Chatham hadn't come out yet. Flag-

ler he spotted the place until six this morning, and then Conklin took his turn again until two o'clock, when I came on for my watch. Just as Conklin was telling me how things stood, who should come down the street but Chatham himself, large as life."

"Down the street?" exclaimed Sturgis.

"Yes, sir. And up he goes, as if nothing had happened, and into the Manhattan Chemical Company's place again."

"He had put up the back-door game on you," said the reporter.

"Yes, sir; just what I said to Conklin. So, quick as a wink, I sent him around the block to keep his eye peeled on the next street and I waited here. And here I've been ever since. If Conklin isn't on the block above, it must be because Chatham has made tracks again, and he after him."

"I'll go and find out," said Sturgis. "Has any one else called at the Manhattan Chemical Company's office since you have been on watch?"

"No, sir; but a couple of hours ago an express wagon came along and delivered a long wooden box; might have been chemicals for the wholesale department, for it was lowered to the cellar

by the hoist in the areaway. The blond young man receipted for the box."

"Very well, Shrady. Hang on a little while longer, and I shall have you relieved just as soon as I possibly can."

So saying, the reporter, who had been pretending to look through his pockets for a coin, ostentatiously slipped a nickel into the outstretched palm before him. The light seemed to die out of the sharp eyes of the detective, and it was the miserable drunkard who staggered back to his place on the stoop next to the saloon, unmindful of the gibes of the young rowdies congregated there.

Sturgis walked up to the next street, where he found a second detective on duty.

"Anything new, Conklin?" he asked.

"No, sir; he's been lying low; looks like he knew he was spotted this time."

"Good. Stay here until I can notify the police that we have run down the quarry. It will be necessary to obtain a search warrant for the Manhattan Chemical Company's place. In the meantime, if Chatham should attempt to make tracks, hang on to him like his shadow and send back word here as soon as you can."

"All right, sir."

Sturgis, after leaving Conklin, walked along the street which the detective was watching and carefully inspected every house on the block. Almost all were huge office buildings; but here and there an old-fashioned brown-stone front stood out conspicuously against the broad expanse of brick walls and iron columns. Half way down the street one of these old houses stood well back from the street line behind a small garden. The reporter stopped near this and read the numbers on the adjoining buildings.

"This is directly back of the Manhattan Chemical Company's office," he mused. "I wonder who lives here. It looks like a respectable place enough. One could obtain a good view of the rear of the Manhattan Chemical Company's office from the back windows. H'm——"

He stood thoughtfully considering what pretext he could use to gain admission to the house, when suddenly he became aware of the presence of a man who had approached with noiseless steps.

"Ah, is that you, Mr. Sturgis?" said the calm, sardonical voice of Doctor Murdock.

The reporter started inwardly but gave no outward sign of surprise.

"Were you about to do me the honor of calling?" continued the chemist.

"Yes," said Sturgis, deliberately; "I was about to seek an interview with you. Can you spare a few minutes?"

"Who is it that asks for the interview?" inquired Murdock, with quiet sarcasm. "Is it Mr. Sturgis, gentleman, Mr. Sturgis, reporter, or——"

Sturgis met a cold gleam from Murdock's inscrutable eyes.

"Or Mr. Sturgis, the famous detective?" continued the chemist with an imperceptible sneer.

"I represent the *Tempest*," replied the reporter quietly.

Murdock glanced carelessly up and down the street. There was no one in sight.

"Oh! very well," he said, taking out his latch-key and leading the way to the house; "come into my study and let me hear what I can do for the *Tempest*."

On entering the house, Murdock motioned Sturgis to the door leading from the hall into the drawing-room.

"If you will step into the parlor for a few minutes, I shall be with you directly," said he.

Sturgis nodded acquiescence, and, while Murdock walked toward his study, which was at the extreme rear of the hall, the reporter opened the drawing-room door. He did not open it very wide, however, neither did he enter; for although the room was rather dark, his quick eye caught a passing glimpse of a feminine head cosily nestled upon a distinctly masculine shoulder, the owner of which had his back turned to him. Bachelor cynic though he was, Sturgis had not the heart to interrupt so interesting a situation; and, as the couple were so absorbed that they had not noticed the intrusion upon their tête-à-tête, he discreetly retreated and softly closed the door.

By this time Murdock had passed into his study, so that Sturgis found himself alone in the hall. He was glad of a short respite during which he might collect his thoughts; for, having been taken by surprise, he had not had time to select a plausible topic for the interview which he had solicited from Murdock. Not knowing that the house was that of the chemist, his sole object had been to gain admittance, so that he might be able to observe the Manhattan Chemi-

cal Company's offices from the rear, and if possible to ascertain how Chatham had managed to give the detectives the slip the first time he appeared to them.

Now that he was in the house the reporter was confronted with the necessity of explaining his presence there without betraying his true purpose. This would not have been a difficult matter had the inmates of the house been total strangers; but he felt that it would be by no means so easy to offer an explanation which would be satisfactory to a man of Murdock's keen perception. And Murdock was the last person to whom he would have confided the true reason of his visit; not only because the chemist, as his opponent in the wager concerning the Knickerbocker Bank Mystery, was interested in thwarting rather than in aiding his investigation, but chiefly because he felt a strong instinctive distrust of the man.

As these thoughts were passing through the reporter's mind, he slowly paced the long hall, back and forth, with his hands behind his back. In so doing, he passed a door which was slightly ajar and caught a glimpse of long rows of bookshelves loaded with beautifully bound editions.

The place was evidently the library. It occurred to him that a library is a public room and that he would be more comfortable in there than in the hall.

He pushed open the door and looked in. The room was empty. He entered.

The library occupied a space between the parlor and the rear room into which Murdock had entered, and it was separated from each of these rooms by folding-doors over which hung heavy portières.

Sturgis was a lover of books ; his interest was at once aroused in the collection before him. It was admirably selected from the standpoint of a philosopher and a man of science. Every department of history, of philosophy and of science had its section, in which the volumes were classified and arranged with intelligent care. But curiously enough, poetry and art were but meagerly represented.

One section especially attracted Sturgis's attention. It was devoted entirely to the history of crime in all its phases and in all ages. Criminal statistics, criminal jurisprudence and the psychology of crime, as well as the biographies of all the noted criminals of ancient and modern

times, were completely represented. Almost the only works of fiction in the collection were in this section, and included every book imaginable concerning criminals and their deeds. Many rare and curious volumes were there—some of them so rare that they could be found in only a few of the great libraries of the world.

Here Sturgis was in his element. He had himself collected a valuable library on the subjects kindred to his profession; but here were books many of which none but a Croesus could ever hope to own. He was soon absorbed in an examination of some rare volumes which he had often longed to possess.

While thus engaged, he became aware of the murmur of voices from the rear room. As the words spoken could not be distinguished, he paid no special attention to them; but, instinctively, he noted that one of the voices flowed in the calm, even tones so characteristic of Murdock's speech, while the other, whose timbre and modulations were unknown to him, betrayed the repressed excitement of the speaker.

It soon became evident that Murdock's interlocutor was fast losing control of himself; for he gradually pitched his voice in a higher key,

until occasional words began to reach Sturgis's ears. The reporter was not the man to wantonly play the part of eavesdropper; therefore, although the isolated words which reached him brought no connected sense, he judged that it was time to move out of earshot of the conversation to which he was becoming an involuntary listener. Replacing upon its shelf the book which he had been examining, he started toward the hall door. As he did so, he heard the now thoroughly excited individual exclaim in loud tones:

"I don't care a damn for the money. I only went into the scheme because you promised she'd have me; and, by God, if I don't get her, I'll give the whole cursed thing away."

Sturgis, who had reached the hall door, pricked up his detective's ears at these words. But in another second he heard the knobs of the folding-doors rattle, as though some one had placed his hands upon them.

Quick as thought, he opened the door and glided out into the hallway. He had not time to pull the door quite to behind him when the folding-doors opened and he heard Murdock say in his calm, frigid tones:

"Perhaps you have done that already with your dulcet voice."

Had Murdock seen him? The reporter asked himself the question. Probably not; for he heard the folding-doors close once more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

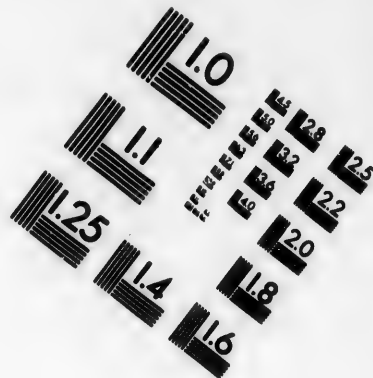
THE EXTENSION.

A FEW minutes later, Sturgis, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the paintings which hung in the hall, heard the door of Murdock's study open softly. Although the reporter did not turn his head, he at once became conscious that the chemist's piercing eyes were fixed upon him. The observation lasted so long that Sturgis, self-possessed as was his wont, was beginning to feel a trifle nervous, when at last Doctor Murdock broke the silence.

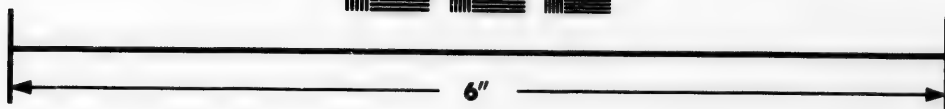
"I have to apologize for leaving you standing in the hall, Mr. Sturgis. I was under the impression that I had invited you to step into the parlor."

The words, courteous in themselves, conveyed to the hearer an impression of biting sarcasm.

"I found the parlor already occupied ; I hesitated to disturb a tête-à-tête," replied Sturgis quietly.



A resolution test chart featuring several groups of horizontal and vertical lines of varying thicknesses. Each group is accompanied by a numerical value indicating the resolution. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2, 3.6, 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, 5.6, 6.3, 7.1, 8.0, 9.0, 10, 11.2, 12.5, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22.5, 25, 28, 32, 36, 40, 45, 50, 56, 63, 71, 80, 90, 100, 112, 125, 140, 160, 180, 200, 225, 250, 280, 320, 360, 400, 450, 500, 560, 630, 710, 800, 900, 1000, 1120, 1250, 1400, 1600, 1800, 2000, 2250, 2500, 2800, 3200, 3600, 4000, 4500, 5000, 5600, 6300, 7100, 8000, 9000, 10000, 11200, 12500, 14000, 16000, 18000, 20000, 22500, 25000, 28000, 32000, 36000, 40000, 45000, 50000, 56000, 63000, 71000, 80000, 90000, 100000, 112000, 125000, 140000, 160000, 180000, 200000, 225000, 250000, 280000, 320000, 360000, 400000, 450000, 500000, 560000, 630000, 710000, 800000, 900000, 1000000, 1120000, 1250000, 1400000, 1600000, 1800000, 2000000, 2250000, 2500000, 2800000, 3200000, 3600000, 4000000, 4500000, 5000000, 5600000, 6300000, 7100000, 8000000, 9000000, 10000000, 11200000, 12500000, 14000000, 16000000, 18000000, 20000000, 22500000, 25000000, 28000000, 32000000, 36000000, 40000000, 45000000, 50000000, 56000000, 63000000, 71000000, 80000000, 90000000, 100000000, 112000000, 125000000, 140000000, 160000000, 180000000, 200000000, 225000000, 250000000, 280000000, 320000000, 360000000, 400000000, 450000000, 500000000, 560000000, 630000000, 710000000, 800000000, 900000000, 1000000000, 1120000000, 1250000000, 1400000000, 1600000000, 1800000000, 2000000000, 2250000000, 2500000000, 2800000000, 3200000000, 3600000000, 4000000000, 4500000000, 5000000000, 5600000000, 6300000000, 7100000000, 8000000000, 9000000000, 10000000000, 11200000000, 12500000000, 14000000000, 16000000000, 18000000000, 20000000000, 22500000000, 25000000000, 28000000000, 32000000000, 36000000000, 40000000000, 45000000000, 50000000000, 56000000000, 63000000000, 71000000000, 80000000000, 90000000000, 100000000000, 112000000000, 125000000000, 140000000000, 160000000000, 180000000000, 200000000000, 225000000000, 250000000000, 280000000000, 320000000000, 360000000000, 400000000000, 450000000000, 500000000000, 560000000000, 630000000000, 710000000000, 800000000000, 900000000000, 1000000000000, 1120000000000, 1250000000000, 1400000000000, 1600000000000, 1800000000000, 2000000000000, 2250000000000, 2500000000000, 2800000000000, 3200000000000, 3600000000000, 4000000000000, 4500000000000, 5000000000000, 5600000000000, 6300000000000, 7100000000000, 8000000000000, 9000000000000, 10000000000000, 11200000000000, 12500000000000, 14000000000000, 16000000000000, 18000000000000, 20000000000000, 22500000000000, 25000000000000, 28000000000000, 32000000000000, 36000000000000, 40000000000000, 45000000000000, 50000000000000, 56000000000000, 63000000000000, 71000000000000, 80000000000000, 90000000000000, 100000000000000, 112000000000000, 125000000000000, 140000000000000, 160000000000000, 180000000000000, 200000000000000, 225000000000000, 250000000000000, 280000000000000, 320000000000000, 360000000000000, 400000000000000, 450000000000000, 500000000000000, 560000000000000, 630000000000000, 710000000000000, 800000000000000, 900000000000000, 1000000000000000, 1120000000000000, 1250000000000000, 1400000000000000, 1600000000000000, 1800000000000000, 2000000000000000, 2250000000000000, 2500000000000000, 2800000000000000, 3200000000000000, 3600000000000000, 4000000000000000, 4500000000000000, 5000000000000000, 5600000000000000, 6300000000000000, 7100000000000000, 8000000000000000, 9000000000000000, 10000000000000000, 11200000000000000, 12500000000000000, 14000000000000000, 16000000000000000, 18000000000000000, 20000000000000000, 22500000000000000, 25000000000000000, 28000000000000000, 32000000000000000, 36000000000000000, 40000000000000000, 45000000000000000, 50000000000000000, 56000000000000000, 63000000000000000, 71000000000000000, 80000000000000000, 90000000000000000, 100000000000000000, 112000000000000000, 125000000000000000, 140000000000000000, 160000000000000000, 180000000000000000, 200000000000000000, 225000000000000000, 250000000000000000, 280000000000000000, 320000000000000000, 360000000000000000, 400000000000000000,



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Murdock eyed him narrowly for a moment, and then invited him into the study.

The chemist's study was a spacious room, plainly but luxuriously furnished, and containing every convenience and comfort calculated to lighten the labor of a busy man. The table, littered with books and papers, stood near a small safe and almost directly opposite the hall door. Speaking-tubes and electric call buttons were within reach of the occupant of the easy chair, and probably placed him in communication with the various portions of the household; while a telephone on one side and a typewriter on the other showed that the chemist kept in touch also with the outside world.

Murdock's interlocutor, whoever he had been, had disappeared. But how? The question interested Sturgis, and his mind at once began to seek an answer to it.

There were three doors leading from the study. One of these was the one by which Murdock and Sturgis had just entered from the hall. No one could have passed out that way without meeting them.

Then there were the folding-doors leading into the library; but, as the door leading from the

library to the hall had remained slightly ajar, Sturgis felt sure that he would have heard the man had he gone out by that way.

The third door led to a small extension.

"He must have gone into the extension," thought Sturgis.

The only alternative was an exit through the windows. This in itself would not have presented any special difficulty; for the distance to the flagging below was hardly more than twelve or thirteen feet. But the yard, which was of diminutive size on account of the space allotted to the garden on the street, was inclosed by an unusually high fence protected by a row of sharp and closely set spikes. These looked so formidable that the thought of any one attempting to scale the fence instantly suggested visions of impaled wretches writhing in Oriental tortures. The only possible exit from the yard, therefore, seemed to be through the basement; that is to say, past the kitchen and the servants' department.

All these thoughts flashed through the reporter's brain in a small fraction of the time which is required to record them. They occurred to him unbidden, while his conscious efforts were

centered upon discovering how Chatham had managed to escape from the rear of the Manhattan Chemical Company's building.

This Sturgis recognized without much difficulty. It was directly in line with the house in which he now was, and its yard did not differ from the neighboring ones, the fences of which could be scaled without much trouble. Chatham evidently might have passed into any one of several buildings which lacked the protection of the formidable spikes that so effectually guarded the approach to Murdock's house from the rear.

One point, however, was puzzling. Why should Chatham take the trouble and the risk of scaling fences in broad daylight, only to return a few hours later by the street door under the very noses of the detectives from whom he had presumably wished to escape? There seemed to be no plausible answer to this question.

But Sturgis was not given much time in which to consider it; for Murdock, who had waited for him to broach the subject of his interview, now coldly remarked:

"Perhaps, Mr. Sturgis, you will be good enough to inform me to what I owe the honor of this visit?"

Sturgis took as a pretext the first subject which came into his mind.

"Doctor," said he, "I have been told that you were engaged in a series of brilliant chemical researches; that you had proved, or were on the point of proving, that several, at least, of the so-called elementary metals are compounds; thus ushering in the realization of the dream of the alchemists—the transmutation of metals——"

"You have not come here to interview me on the subject of my chemical researches?" laughed Murdock.

"Why not?"

"Because I gave you credit for possessing the scientific spirit. A man spends years in making a series of exhaustive experiments, and refrains from advancing any theory until he has built up an elaborate monument of cold facts; and you ask him to make a premature report to be spread broadcast in a sensational sheet, with all the embellishments which an unbridled reportorial imagination can add to it. No sir, my report, when it is ready, will be made through the proper channels. I am surprised that one who passes for a man of science should be willing to make such a request."

If Murdock intended to gall the reporter, he succeeded ; for, modest as he was, Sturgis prided himself above all things upon the scientific value of his work in all its aspects. He manifested no external sign of annoyance, however, as he answered with a smile :

" I am not a man of science now, but only a reporter."

" In that case," replied Murdock, " let us talk of something else. I should be pleased to discuss my chemical researches with Mr. Sturgis, the scientist ; but with Mr. Sturgis, the reporter, I should prefer to talk about something in his line of knowledge ; let me see, shall we say the Knickerbocker Bank Mystery, for instance ?"

The reporter's ear detected the venomous sarcasm to which he was now accustomed from this strange man. He raised his eyes to those of the chemist, and for the space of a few seconds the two men looked steadily into each other's souls.

Then a sudden light flashed across Sturgis's brain, and he started perceptibly. At the same time, he thought he saw a shadow cross Murdock's impassive features ; but in this he might have been mistaken, for when he looked again, the

chemist was regarding him with an air of mild curiosity.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Sturgis?" he asked.

"Only a sudden thought," carelessly replied Sturgis, who, to all appearances, had completely recovered from the momentary shock produced by the suddenness of the suspicion which had crossed his mind. "Your mention of the Knickerbocker Bank Mystery reminded me of something, that is all."

"Ever since Sprague's dinner," said Murdock, "I have been devoting all my spare time to the reading of the *Tempest*, in the hope of finding there a sensational account, with glaring headlines, of the brilliant work of our 'distinguished reporter, Mr. Sturgis.'"

Sturgis made no reply. His eyes were fixed upon the typewriter which stood near Murdock's desk.

"Up to the present time," continued Murdock, "I have not seen anything to cause me to worry about my stakes."

"I have still twenty-eight days in which to complete my case," said Sturgis.

"True," replied Murdock. "Well, I wish you

luck. If I can render you any assistance in your investigations, I hope you will call upon me. In the cause of science I would willingly jeopardize my stakes. For instance, if you need to consult any works of reference, my library is at your disposal. I am told that, at least on the subjects in which you are interested, it is quite complete."

He observed the reporter narrowly, as if to mark the effect of his words.

"It is," replied Sturgis, after an almost imperceptible hesitation; "I have already admired it."

"Indeed?" said Murdock, arching his brows in mild surprise.

"Yes; I stepped into the library for a few minutes while I was waiting for you."

"Ah! yes; I sec."

Murdock gave the reporter another searching look. Then he leant back in his easy chair with half-closed eyes and silently puffed away at his cigar for a few minutes.

Had Sturgis been able to read the sinister thoughts which were passing through the mind of this impassive man as he sat apparently in lazy enjoyment of his fragrant Havana, it is probable that he might have lost some of the interest which he seemed suddenly to have de-

veloped in the typewriter. But he was busy with his own train of thought and therefore was not paying any particular attention to Murdock.

Presently the chemist spoke again.

"On second thoughts, Mr. Sturgis, if you will step into my laboratory, I shall be pleased to show you those of the results of my recent researches which are ready for publication."

The reporter was surprised at this sudden change of front, and perhaps a trifle suspicious, for he was beginning to weld together many hitherto isolated facts into a strong chain which was leading him from the Knickerbocker bank and Chatham, through the Manhattan Chemical Company, to the emotionless man in whose presence he now stood. Some important links were missing, however, and Sturgis could not afford to lose any chance of making the chain complete.

He therefore accepted Murdock's invitation, in the hope of making some discovery which would throw positive light upon the somewhat hazy situation.

"Very well," said Murdock; "wait for me just one minute while I open the ventilators of the laboratory. It becomes pretty close in there when the place has been shut up for some time."

So saying, Murdock turned a crank which projected from the wall. A grating sound was heard, as of the rasping of metal upon metal. Then he returned to his desk, where he busied himself for a few minutes under pretext of looking for some notes of his experiments. When apparently he had found what he was seeking, he went toward the door of the extension. This was of massive hard wood. Before turning the knob, the chemist stooped as though to examine the lower hinge. Sturgis was not consciously following Murdock's movements. His mind was bent upon accomplishing a certain object; and, with that end in view, he was gradually drawing nearer to the typewriter. But so accustomed was he to receiving detailed impressions of all that occurred before his eyes, that the chemist's actions, unimportant as they seemed at the time, were unconsciously recorded upon the reporter's brain.

Murdock opened the door of the extension and passed out of the room. Sturgis, watching his chance, snatched up a sheet of paper from the table, inserted it in the typewriter, and rattled off something as fast as he could. Looking up when he had finished, he saw that Murdock had returned and was observing him with a sardonic grin.

"More happy thoughts?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered Sturgis, calmly folding the paper and slipping it into the pocket of his coat.

Murdock chuckled to himself, as if enjoying a quiet joke.

"Well," said he, "if you will do me the honor, we can step down into the laboratory."

Sturgis nodded and went toward the door which Murdock held open. As he passed the chemist, the reporter caught his eye, and, in a flash, read there some sinister purpose, which caused him to hesitate, on his guard.

At that moment there came a knock upon the hall door.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Murdock, "here comes an interruption, I suppose. Please step down stairs; I shall be with you directly."

With these words, he quietly but firmly shoved the reporter into the extension, and, with a rapid motion, pushed forward the door.

Sturgis almost lost his balance, but instinctively put out his foot between the door and the jamb. He felt a strong pressure from the outside; but he knew he was master of the situation and patiently bided his time. Presently the pressure ceased, and he was able to open the door.

Murdock wore an air of pained surprise.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"I have just remembered an important engagement," said Sturgis unruffled. "I fear, after all, that I shall be unable to visit your laboratory at present. I hope, however, that the pleasure is only postponed for a short time."

"I hope so," replied Murdock, calmly meeting his steady gaze.

All this had happened in the space of a few seconds. Meanwhile the knocking at the door was renewed.

"Come in," said Murdock, moving toward his easy chair.

The door opened and a servant appeared.

"Plaze, sur, Miss Agnes wud loike ter know kin yer resave her sum toime this afthernoon?"

"Yes, Mary; tell Miss Agnes I shall be in all the rest of the afternoon, and that I shall be at her disposal at any time."

Sturgis, picking up his hat and coat, hurried from the house.

"Why did he want to shut me in the extension?" he asked himself over and over, and he could find no satisfactory answer to the question.

Then he took from his pocket the lines he had

written on Murdock's typewriter, and compared them carefully with those on the sheet which he had laboriously pieced together in the Knickerbocker bank on the previous day.

The result of the examination was apparently satisfactory; for, when Sturgis returned the papers to his pocket, his face wore an expression of calm but unmistakable triumph.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE.

As he reached the corner, Sturgis came upon Sprague, who was waiting for a car.

"Oh! I say, old man," exclaimed the artist, hardly able to conceal his elation, "I am glad to see you. I have news to tell you."

"So have I. But I am in a hurry now. Come along with me; we can exchange confidences on the way."

"Very well; whither are you bound?"

"I am on the track of big game. Can you spare a couple of hours? I think I can promise you an interesting afternoon."

"What is it? The Knickerbocker bank case?"

"Yes."

Sprague readily consented to accompany his friend.

"By the way," inquired Sturgis, "have you any weapons?"

"Any quantity of them among the properties

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of the studio," replied Sprague surprised ; "but I do not go about armed in broad daylight."

"You would better have a revolver," said the reporter. "You will probably have no occasion to use it," he added in answer to his friend's glance, "but it is best to be on the safe side."

"Very well ; I shall go home for one. Where am I to meet you ?"

"At police headquarters in about half an hour. Let me see ; it is now nearly five o'clock. Say at half past five. It will be necessary to obtain a couple of warrants and the help of the police before we start."

After Sprague had left him, Sturgis approached Detective Conklin, who was still at his post.

"Has Chatham shown up while I was in there?" he asked, indicating Murdock's house.

"No, sir."

"Did you notice the man with whom I went in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let Chatham go for the present and stick close to that man if he stirs from the house. I shall be back in less than an hour."

"All right, sir."

When Sprague reached police headquarters, he

found the reporter ready to start with four detectives. He had not, therefore, any opportunity for conversation with his friend until the party reached its destination. There two of the detectives relieved the men previously on duty, while the others accompanied Sturgis and Sprague to the office of the Manhattan Chemical Company.

It was after six o'clock. The place was closed for the night and seemed quite deserted. One of the men rang the bell. The tinkling echoes died away, but no sign of life manifested itself from within. Then he seized the pull and plied it again repeatedly and vigorously.

"That will do," observed Sturgis presently; "the old woman is coming as fast as she can."

"What old woman?" asked the detective.

"I don't know. Perhaps I ought to have said *an* old woman. I hear her hobbling on the stairs."

The detective placed his ear to the keyhole. After listening attentively, he turned to the reporter with an incredulous smile.

"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said he, "if you can hear anything in there, your ears are sharper than mine. That's all I can say."

"She is on the second flight," replied the reporter quietly. "Now she is in the second-

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story hall,—and now you can surely hear her coming down the last flight."

By this time, sure enough, the sound of footsteps began to be audible to the other three men; and presently the door opened and disclosed the scared face of an old Irish woman.

"And phwat might yez be wantin', gintlemin, to be after scarin' an ould woman most to death wid yer ringin'?" she asked, somewhat aggressively.

"We want to see Mr. Chatham," replied one of the detectives.

"Mister who, is it?"

"Thomas Chatham. Show me the way to his room. I'll go right up, and my friends will wait for me here."

"Mister Thomuz Chathum, is it?" said the old woman; "well, ye've come to the wrong house to see him, I do be thinkin', fer he don't live here."

"Come, that won't do," said the detective sharply; "we belong to the police, and we saw Chatham enter this house."

At the mention of the police, the old hag's parchment face became a shade yellower and her eyes glistened.

"Sure, thin, if he do be hidin' here, it's mesilf

as 'ud know it," she said after a short interval; "but yez can foind 'um, if yez loike; yez can foind 'um."

Whereupon she turned and hobbled off, leaving the intruders to their own resources.

They found themselves in a narrow hallway. On the right was a rickety staircase leading to business offices in the upper part of the building; on the left, a door opening into the office of the Manhattan Chemical Company, and at the end of the hall another door, marked,

PRIVATE OFFICE NO ADMITTANCE.

One of the detectives tried this door and found it locked. Whereupon he placed his shoulder to it and prepared to force it in.

"Wait a minute," said Sturgis; "let me see if I cannot open it."

The detective stepped aside with a quizzical expression upon his face.

"I guess you will find it pretty solid for your weight," said he.

The reporter took from his pocket a piece of

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bent wire, and, with a few dexterous turns of the wrist, he shot the bolt of the lock.

"You would make an expert cracksman," said the detective. "I didn't know you possessed that accomplishment in addition to all your other ones."

The four men entered the private office. The room was quite dark, the shutters being closed and the blinds drawn. As their eyes became accustomed to the obscurity they were able to distinguish the outlines of a desk, a table, and a few chairs.

Sturgis went at once to a door in the corner. With the aid of his skeleton key he had soon thrown this open. After peering for an instant into the darkness, he took from his pocket a candle, which he lighted. Then, beckoning to his companions, he started cautiously to descend. The other men followed him and soon found themselves in the cellar, which they proceeded to search.

On the street side there was a recess extending for a few feet under the area in front of the house. The opening above was covered by an iron grating, over which was a wooden cover securely fastened on the inside by a chain and padlock. A

number of carboys were carefully piled along the east wall to within a few feet from the rear of the building. Here, in the northeast corner, rose narrow shelving, on which were arranged a collection of bottles containing a varied assortment of chemicals.

The detectives searched the cellar.

"Our man is not here, at any rate," said the leader, when at last he had returned to the foot of the stairs; "perhaps he'll try to give us the slip by way of the roof. Come along, Jim; let's go upstairs now. Hello! what are you doing there, Mr. Sturgis? Think you'll find him in one of those bottles?"

The reporter appeared to be closely inspecting the chemicals on the narrow shelves.

"Who knows?" he replied coolly, continuing his examination.

The detective bit his lip and looked the unpleasant things he thought it best not to say.

"Well, Jim and I will take a look upstairs while you are busy here."

And the two men went up the dark stairway, Sprague remaining behind with the reporter.

"None so blind as those that won't see," said the latter, sententiously.

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At the same time he placed his hand upon one of the shelves and gave it a lateral push. It responded slightly, and the entire shelving, with the door which it concealed, opened outward.

"I thought so," continued the reporter; "this looks as if it might lead somewhere. Will you come, Sprague?"

"How did you find the combination so quickly?" asked the artist, preparing to follow his friend.

"It is not a combination—only a concealed bolt. Our friends of the detective force might have discovered it themselves if they had taken the trouble. The first thing I noticed was that a truck had recently been wheeled through the cellar in the direction of this door, from under the grating on the street side. And this truck was not here; neither was a large case which we know was delivered here to-day. The trail extended clear up to the wall below the shelving; and yet no truck, even unloaded, could pass below that lowest shelf. The conclusion was evident. I sounded the back of the shelving and found that it covered an opening of some kind. After that, all that remained was to notice that one of the shelves was slightly soiled in just one spot, as

though by the repeated contact of a hand. From this, I argued that the bolt must be attached to this board. And it was. That is all."

As he spoke, the reporter entered a dark and narrow passage.

"Don't shut the door," said he to his companion, who followed him.

At that moment, however, the artist stumbled; and, instinctively holding out his hands to save himself from falling, he released his hold of the door, which closed with a slam.

"That is unfortunate," said Sturgis; "we may have to lose some time in learning how to work the bolt from this side. Hold on; it will be prudent to keep open a line of retreat, in case of unforeseen emergencies. Hello! we are in luck. Nothing concealed on this side; the bolt in plain sight; works easily. All's well. Then let us go on; unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall find another exit on the other side."

After following the underground passage for some distance, the men climbed some steps and reached a square chamber, on one side of which rose a stairway leading to a door above. The room was surmounted by a skylight, which was wide open, admitting a draught of cold air from the outside.

Sturgis set down his lighted candle and proceeded to examine his surroundings. In the middle of the room stood a truck, upon which lay a long pine box. A table and a chair constituted the only furniture of the place. At one side, there was a long, low, lead-lined tank, filled to the depth of about two feet with a dark viscous liquid. Near it lay a few empty carboys. In the floor there was what seemed to be a hot-air register, of large size and of peculiar construction. The walls were bare, unbroken, save by the projection of the mouth-piece of a speaking-tube, and by a set of shelves filled with flasks, crucibles, alembics and the other paraphernalia of a chemist's laboratory.

After the reporter had finished reconnoitering, he sat down upon the long box in deep thought. Sprague observed him with silent curiosity for a while; and then, with growing impatience,

"I say, old man," he ventured at last to ask, "did you bring me here, armed to the teeth, to see you go off into a trance?"

Sturgis started like a man suddenly awakened from a deep sleep.

"Eh? What?—Oh, yes—those confidences. Well, you start in with yours. I am trying to

find the dénouement of my story. I feel that it is just within my grasp ; and yet I cannot seem to see it yet. But I can listen to you while I am thinking. Go on."

"I have not any story to tell," said Sprague, somewhat offended at his friend's apparent indifference to what he had to say.

"Oh, yes, you have," retorted Sturgis, with a conciliatory smile ; "you said you had news to tell me. Well, tell away. I am listening most respectfully in spite of my apparent absorption."

"What a strange fellow you are, Sturgis," laughed Sprague good naturedly. "All I wanted to tell you—and you are the first to hear of it,—is the, to me, rather important fact that I am engaged to be married."

"You are?" exclaimed Sturgis with genuine pleasure. "I congratulate you, old fellow, from the bottom of my heart."

He seized the artist's hand and shook it in his hearty grasp.

"To the original of the picture you wanted to show me yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then she was not betrothed to the other fellow, after all?"

"No; that seems to have been a mistake."

"I am glad of that, very glad," said the reporter. "By the way, you have not yet told me the young lady's name."

"I thought I had mentioned it yesterday morning. Didn't I? No? My fiancée is Miss Murdock."

At the sound of this name Sturgis started visibly, and a shadow crossed his features.

"Miss Murdock?" he echoed.

"Yes," said Sprague. "What is it? You do not seem pleased."

Then, as a sudden thought struck him:

"I hope I am not treading on your toes, old fellow," he said, putting his hand gently upon his friend's shoulder, and trying to read his thought in his clear gray eyes. "But how absurd! Of course you cannot be a rival for Miss Murdock's affections, since you do not even know her——"

"No," laughed Sturgis, regaining his composure, "I am not your rival. As to the other point, while I can hardly claim an acquaintance with the young lady, I think I saw her not more than a couple of hours ago."

"A couple of hours ago!" exclaimed Sprague; "why, I was with her myself then."

"I know that now, although I was not aware of it at the time."

"What, were you at the Murdocks' at the same time as I was?" asked Sprague, surprised.

"I had just come from there when I met you. I was in Murdock's study while you were—er—busy in the parlor."

"In Murdock's study? How long were you there?"

"About half an hour, I should judge," replied Sturgis, "and perhaps fifteen minutes more in the hall, while Murdock was engaged."

"I suppose Chatham was still with him," mused Sprague.

Sturgis started at the name.

"Chatham!" he ejaculated; "what do you know about Chatham?"

"What, are you interested in Chatham?" asked the artist, curiously. "I know very little about him, only that he is one of my disappointed rivals."

And he thereupon related to the reporter what he knew of Chatham's suit.

Sturgis listened with deep attention to his friend's narrative, and ruminated in silence long after the artist had ceased speaking.

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At last he started up with a sudden exclamation, and walking over to the side of the tank, he looked into the depths of its oily contents, as if fascinated by some horrible thing he saw there.

Sprague came and stood beside him and gazed curiously into the viscous liquid. There was nothing there that he could see.

"What is it?" he asked.

Without replying, Sturgis took from his pocket a bone-handled knife and carefully dipped one end of the handle into the fluid in the leaden tank. At once the liquid began to seethe and boil, giving out dark pungent fumes.

"I thought so," muttered the reporter, under his breath; "that man is truly a genius—the genius of evil."

"Who?" asked Sprague.

Sturgis made no reply. His eyes were wandering about the room, as if in search of something.

"Hand me a couple of those long glass tubes from that shelf yonder," he said, earnestly.

The artist complied with the request. Dipping these tubes into the oily liquid, Sturgis, after considerable difficulty, managed to seize with them a small dark object which lay at the

bottom of the tank. With infinite precaution, he brought it to the surface. It had the appearance of a flattened leaden bullet.

"What is it?" inquired Sprague.

"Sit down," answered Sturgis, in a low, tense voice. "I have just found the last link which completes my chain of evidence; I am now prepared to tell you such a story as you will scarcely credit, even with the absolute proofs before your eyes."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LEAD-LINED VAT.

SPRAGUE seated himself upon the long pine box ; and Sturgis, dropping into the only chair, began his narrative. As he talked, he carelessly whittled the cover of the wooden box with the knife which he still held in his hand. He began with an account of his investigation at the Knickerbocker bank, and explained the result of his observations and inferences down to the time of his visit to Murdock's house, omitting, however, to mention any of the names of the actors in the reconstructed drama.

"So you see," he concluded, "we have established the identity of the body in the cab, and of the young man who disappeared after the cab was upset. But one of the most salient features of the case, from the start, was the fact that neither of these two men had derived much, if any, pecuniary profit from his crime. The bookkeeper, as we have seen, was a mere cats-

paw in the control of the accountant, and his posthumous confession has given us the explanation of the power exerted over him by his accomplice. It was not so easy to establish the motive which controlled the actions of the accountant, who was himself only a tool in the hands of a higher intelligence. The *deus ex machina* of this crime is a man of genius who has hardly appeared upon the scene at all, but whose traces I have found at every turn. He was the brains of the whole scheme; the other men in his hands were mere puppets. Through the accountant, this master spirit managed the book-keeper; and the accountant himself was controlled by him more directly, but no less surely. If he held the former through his fear of exposure and consequent ruin, he influenced the latter through even more potent motives. He is the father of a beautiful girl, whom he did not scruple to use as a decoy. The price agreed upon for the accountant's assistance was the hand of this daughter, for whom the young man had doubtless conceived a passionate love. Whether or not the leader would have had the power to carry out his part of the contract matters little; for it is highly probable that he never had the

slightest intention of so doing. He evidently realized very early in the game that the bookkeeper could not long escape the clutches of the law. But as he had taken every precaution to prevent him from knowing anything of his very existence, the fate of the unfortunate bookkeeper would have mattered little to this heartless villain, had not the probability remained that, when brought to bay, the bookkeeper would denounce the accountant's connection with the crime. This would have been extremely awkward, since the accountant was very likely in possession of some dangerous secrets. The safest way out of the difficulty was to quietly suppress the now useless bookkeeper. This plan was decided upon, and would doubtless have been carried into execution, had not fate otherwise decreed. After the bookkeeper's death, under the circumstances which I have related, it became quite probable that the accountant's connection with the case would be discovered; for luck had been against him from the start, and he became more and more entangled in the chain of circumstantial evidence of whose existence his leader was soon fully aware. In the first place, the accountant was wounded; and

thus not only partially disabled, but also,—what is far worse,— conspicuously marked. A man who carries his arm in a sling can hardly fail to attract attention, especially when this distinguishing mark is accompanied by another equally glaring one in the form of a head of brilliant red hair——”

“Hold on, Sturgis!” interrupted Sprague, who had been listening with growing interest; “don’t you know the accountant’s name?”

“Yes,” replied the reporter; “his name is Thomas Chatham.”

“Thomas Chatham!” exclaimed Sprague, as the image of the miserable young man came to his mind.

“Yes,” replied Sturgis, answering his thought, “the man you met only a few hours ago.”

There was a brief silence, broken at last by Sprague, who asked:

“Has he escaped?”

Sturgis hesitated.

“That depends upon how we look at it,” he said gravely at length; “he has paid the penalty of his crimes.”

“What do you mean?”

“He is dead,” answered the reporter.

"Dead? But I tell you I saw him——"

"I know; but he has died since."

'Suicide?'

"No;" the reporter's voice sank to a whisper;
"murder!"

"Murder?" repeated the artist, startled.
"But how do you know that?"

"This lump of lead tells the story," said Sturgis, holding up the shapeless piece of metal which he had taken out of the vat.

"What is it? A bullet?"

"Yes; the bullet which Chatham carried in his arm from the time that he was wounded by Arbogast, the bullet which has enabled me to trace him step by step, from his flight from the overturned cab, to Doctor Thurston's, and finally to his death in this very room; the bullet whose peculiar shape is recorded in this shadow picture taken by Thurston by means of the Roentgen rays."

So saying, he handed Sprague the photograph. But the artist had ceased to listen.

"In this very room?" he mused aloud, looking about him with awe.

"Yes. The story is simple enough. The man whose instrument Chatham was, is not one

who would care to be lumbered up with tools, which become positively dangerous as soon as they cease to be useful. This man, totally unhampered by pity, gratitude or fear, determined to destroy the accountant, whose discovery might have imperilled his own welfare. What mattered a human life or two, when weighed against the possible loss of his own life or liberty, or of his high social standing and his enormous wealth; for this man is both renowned and rich, and he appears to have brought wholesale murder to a science."

"Do you mean to say that wholesale murder can be indulged in with impunity in a city like New York, at the end of the nineteenth century?" asked Sprague aghast.

"Yes; when it is done in the systematic and scientific manner that has been employed here. For this murderer is the most remarkable criminal of modern times. He has not been satisfied with killing his victims; he has succeeded in completely wiping them out of existence. Criminals have often attempted to destroy the bodies of their victims, but they have never before succeeded as this man has. He is a chemist of remarkable talent, and he has discovered a com-

pound in which bone as well as human tissue is rapidly and totally dissolved. There it is in yonder tank. See how completely the liquid has destroyed the bone handle of this knife."

Sturgis, after showing the damaged knife to his companion, resumed his whittling upon the cover of the box on which the artist was seated.

"Chatham's body has been dissolved in that tank within a very short time. It has entirely disappeared; this flattened bullet alone is left, lead being one of the few substances which are not soluble in the contents of that tank. Fortunately he overlooked that fact. Genius has its lapses."

Presently Sprague ventured to say:

"If numerous crimes have been committed here, as you intimate, I do not understand how it is that suspicion has never rested on this house before."

"The author of these crimes has taken every precaution to render the chance of discovery quite remote. His dwelling-house on one street, and the bogus Chemical Company on the other, are in communication through this underground passage, while apparently having no connection with each other. Moreover, he is too shrewd to

make frequent use of this death chamber. That does well enough as a last resort, when he is obliged to commit the murders with his own hands; but I suspect that this man has other agents like Chatham, who do the dirty work for him and then quietly ship the bodies here for annihilation, as it was intended should be done with Arbogast's. Ah! yes; I thought so. You are sitting upon one of these bodies now."

Sprague started to his feet; and, following the direction in which Sturgis was pointing with his open knife, he vaguely discerned, through the opening which the reporter had whittled, a small surface of what had once been the features of a human being.

After gazing for some minutes in horror-stricken silence at the distorted face, the artist asked in a low voice:

"How did Chatham meet his death?"

"I don't know yet," answered Sturgis gravely; "this man is no ordinary criminal. His work is clean and leaves no blood-stains and no disorder to tell of its accomplishment. He takes life with his own hands only when he is forced to do so; but, when he does, his method is masterly. It was easier to make away with Chatham than to

pay him the price agreed upon for his complicity in the Knickerbocker bank embezzlement; and so his life was taken. I hope to discover how before I leave here."

Sprague started as the reporter ceased speaking.

"The price of his complicity?" he exclaimed, laying his hand upon Sturgis's arm, and looking earnestly into his eyes.

"Yes," replied the reporter, steadily meeting his friend's gaze, "his daughter's hand."

Sprague looked away from the honest eyes of the reporter, as if he dreaded to read in them the answer to his next question.

"Who is this fiend incarnate, who is willing to traffic in his own flesh and blood, and with whom murder is a science?"

"The man who is capable of these crimes, and of any others which might serve to remove an obstacle from his way, is——"

The reporter did not finish his sentence. He suddenly grasped his companion by the arm and stood transfixed, his eyes dilated, his neck craned in a listening attitude, every muscle tense like those of a wild animal in ambush, about to spring upon its approaching prey.

Presently a click was heard as though a bolt had been shot from its socket.

"Draw your revolver!" Sturgis whispered hoarsely to his companion. "Quick!—Look there!"

At the same time he drew his own weapon and pointed in the direction of the door at the head of the stairs. The door opened, and a man entered, quietly smoking a cigar.

"Doctor Murdock!" exclaimed Sprague with horror.

Murdock, still holding the door ajar, eyed the two men for an instant, his impassive face betraying not the slightest sign of emotion. Then, taking his cigar from his lips:

"Ah, gentlemen," he drawled in his ironical way, "I am delighted to see you. I trust you will make yourselves perfectly at home for a few minutes. I shall return directly. You can continue to work out your little problem in the meantime, Mr. Sturgis."

With these words he calmly turned to leave the room.

"Stop!" shouted Sturgis, levelling his revolver at Murdock's head: "stand where you are or I fire!"

The reporter's shot rang out almost before he had finished his sentence ; but Murdock, unscathed, passed out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Sprague, dazed by the rapidity with which this scene had been acted, stood rooted to the spot, without having made any attempt to use the revolver which he had drawn at Sturgis's bidding.

The reporter sprang up the stairs and threw his weight against the door. But it was doubtless intended to withstand great shocks, for it remained unshaken.

"Check!" came the sound of a mocking voice from the other side of the door.

Then, rushing down the stairs again, Sturgis shouted to his companion :

"Come quick! We must get out of here!"

And he led the way through the subterranean passage toward the cellar of the Manhattan Chemical Company.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEATH CHAMBER.

BEFORE the men had gone many steps a grating sound reached their ears from the direction of the skylight. They looked up and saw sliding steel shutters slowly and ponderously close, like grim jaws; and suddenly they felt themselves cut off from the outside world.

Sturgis, taking up his lighted candle, made his way to the door of the subterranean passage and tried in vain to open it; the heavy iron bolt remained immovable in its socket. Inch by inch he scrutinized the door with growing anxiety. At last he abandoned the search, and returned in the direction of the square chamber.

"That explains why he wanted to shut me in here when I was in his office," he muttered under his breath.

"What is the matter?" asked Sprague.

"We are caught like rats in a trap," replied

Sturgis. Then with feeling he added: "I do not know how this will end, old man. I have bungled and I fear the game is lost. If our lives are the forfeit, you will owe your death to my stupidity."

Sprague looked at his friend, as if surprised to hear him apparently abandon the fight.

"Don't worry about me," he said kindly; "I came here of my own free will. But," he added, as a vision of Agnes Murdock flashed upon his mind, "I have no intention to die just yet, if I can help it. Are we not both able-bodied men and armed? What can one man do against two?"

"It is not an open fight," said Sturgis, "but I am glad to see your spirit. I do not give up; but I want you to realize that we are in a critical situation, with the odds enormously against us."

"Why, what can Murdock do?"

"Perhaps what he did to Chatham. It will probably not be long before we discover what that was."

"But there must be some way of opening that door from the inside," said Sprague.

"There evidently is none," replied Sturgis; "he probably controls these doors from the outside by electrical connection."

The men were back in the square chamber. Sturgis's eyes were roving restlessly over the walls, ceiling and floor in search of a loophole of escape.

"There is no chance to reach the skylight without a ladder; and even if we could reach it, we should be no further advanced, as it would be impossible to make any impression on the steel shutters. That leaves the register and the speaking-tube. While I examine the register, suppose you try the tube. If it connects with the Manhattan Chemical Company's office, there is a bare chance that we may attract the attention of the detectives whom we left there."

"As we were saying, Mr. Sturgis——"

The words came in Murdock's mocking tones.

Sturgis quickly held the lighted candle above his head and peered in the direction whence came the sound. A panel of the door at the head of the stairs had been pushed up, revealing a small opening covered by a strong and closely woven wire netting.

"As we were saying, 'murder will out!' Nevertheless, it is sometimes easier to weld a chain, even of circumstantial evidence, than it is to predict who will be bound in it."

Sturgis and Sprague stood in the glimmering light of the candle, silently watching the glowing eyes behind the screen.

"Mr. Sturgis, you are a clever man," continued Murdock, "an uncommonly clever man. I frankly admit that I had underrated your ability. But then we are all fallible, after all. I made my share of blunders, as you seem to have discovered; but you will doubtless now concede that your own course has not been entirely free from errors. And now that we have reached the conclusion of this interesting game, I have the honor to announce, 'mate in one move!' Perhaps you are surprised that I should take the trouble to explain the situation to you so clearly. I do so in recognition of your superior intelligence. I see in you a peer. If matters could have been so arranged, I should have been proud to work in harmony with such a man as you; and indeed, when, a short time ago, I invited you to my laboratory, it was my intention to offer you a compromise which I hoped I might be able to persuade you to accept. I felt that you would prove an ally who could be trusted. But, alas, that is impossible now, on account of your friend's presence. With all due respect to

Mr. Sprague, as an amiable man of the world and a prince of good fellows, it may be said that he is not one of us. Much to my sorrow, therefore, I am left no alternative to the course I am about to adopt. The fault, if anybody's, is your own, after all, Mr. Sprague. There is a homely but expressive adage concerning the danger of 'monkeying' with a buzz saw. Why, my dear friend, did you 'monkey' with Mr. Sturgis's buzz saw, instead of sticking to your palette and maulstick.

"But I fear I am growing garrulous, gentlemen. If I had time, I should like to explain to Mr. Sturgis the details of some of the more important, and, in my humble opinion, more brilliant schemes of which I have been the——ah——the promoter; for I dislike to be judged by the bungling operations which have so nearly caused me to lose this latest little game. But this cannot be. I shall have to continue to confide to the pages of my journal, as I have done for years, the interesting events of, if I may say so, a somewhat remarkable career, which I hope will some day, after my death, find their way in print to public favor. My dream has always been that some such man as Mr. Sturgis might ultimately

edit these memoirs; but, alas, the fondest of human dreams are seldom destined to be realized.

"Now then, gentlemen, before finally parting with you, I wish to honorably carry out the terms of my wager with Mr. Sturgis. I concede the fact that, to all intents and purposes, he has won the bet, and I authorize you, Mr. Sprague, as stakeholder, to pay him the amount I deposited with you. As I have already suggested, he has made some perhaps excusable mistakes; but then, as he himself stated the other night, 'a detective has a lifetime in which to correct a blunder.' A lifetime! It is not in accordance with Mr. Sturgis's usual practice to use so vague a term. A lifetime is not necessarily a very long time, Mr. Sturgis."

During this tirade Sturgis and Sprague had remained standing with their eyes fixed upon the gleaming carbuncles which peered at them from behind the grated peephole at the top of the stairs. The artist seemed to realize that the fight was lost. His attitude was that of a brave man accepting, with calm despair, an unpleasant but inevitable doom. The reporter had drawn his revolver at the first sound of Murdock's voice, but had immediately returned it to his

pocket upon realizing that the chemist was protected by a bullet-proof grating. Now, pale and collected, he remained inscrutable. It was impossible, even for the sharp eyes of Murdock, to determine whether he was at last resigned to his fate, or whether his active mind was still on the alert for a loophole of escape.

The bit of candle which he held in his hand had burned so low that at last he was unable to hold it without risk of burning his fingers. Whereupon he coolly set it down upon the stone floor, where presently the wick fell over into a pool of molten paraffine, and the flame spluttered noisily, sending fitful gleams through the darkness.

"Well," continued Murdock's voice, "it is at any rate a great satisfaction to play a game with an adversary worthy of one's steel. You have played well, Mr. Sturgis. I think you would have won modestly ; and you are losing as I would myself have lost, had our positions been reversed. Good-bye."

The gleaming eyes disappeared from the grating, and the sliding panel closed with a metallic click.

"Now then," said Sturgis to his companion,

"the last chance lies in the speaking-tube. But first help me move this box."

"What do you want to do with the box?" asked Sprague, who, however, did as he was bid.

"It may help us to gain a little time. Put it down here."

Sturgis struck a match and pointed out the spot.

"On the hot-air register?"

"On what looks like a hot-air register. Did you ever see a hot-air register with no apparent means of shutting off the heat?"

Sprague, who stood almost over the register, suddenly threw back his head and gasped for breath.

"You have discovered the secret of this death trap," said Sturgis, observing him.

"Gas!" spluttered the artist.

"Yes, he is going to asphyxiate us. Now, quick, to the speaking-tube! The box will somewhat retard the rush of gas; but, at the best, it is only a question of minutes before the air becomes so charged as to render respiration impossible."

Sprague rushed to the speaking-tube and

whistled long and loud, after which he placed his ear to the mouthpiece.

"I hear some one walking," he suddenly exclaimed.

The two men listened in breathless silence for an answering call.

"Well, gentlemen ; what can I do for you ?"

The words came in Murdock's voice.

Sprague's eyes met those of the reporter and saw that the last faint glimmer of hope was gone. In that swift and silent interchange of thought there was resignation to the inevitable doom and the final farewell of two brave hearts.

The spluttering candle gave its last flicker and went out, leaving the prisoners in utter darkness.

The room was rapidly filling with gas, and they were beginning to feel its effects.

"We can at least complete our task before we die," said Sturgis with grim determination.

"Our task !"

"Yes, and insure Murdock's conviction for our murder."

"What chance is there that any one will ever discover our bodies, since they are destined for Murdock's oblivion tank ?"

"Give me your hand," Sturgis replied ; "there

is a box of matches. I place it here, between us, within easy reach. I want to write a few words to the superintendent of police to explain matters. By that time there will be enough gas in the room to produce a terrific explosion, when we strike a match. We can thus succeed in wrecking this place and calling attention to it. If I should succumb before you do, do not fail to light the match."

While he was speaking, the reporter had taken from his pocket a pad and a pencil, and had begun to write as rapidly as he could in the darkness.

Sprague's head was beginning to swim and his ears were ringing, but the thought of Agnes Murdock was uppermost in his mind.

"An explosion!" he exclaimed; "no, no; that must not be. What of Agnes? She may be hurt?"

Sturgis continued writing.

"It is the only chance there is of bringing Murdock to justice," he said, firmly.

"But Agnes is innocent of his crimes," urged the artist, in a thick voice. His tongue clove to his palate; he felt his consciousness ebbing. "Why should she suffer? I am going, old man

—I cannot hold out any longer—Promise me that you—that you will not—strike—the match—”

He staggered and fell against the reporter, who caught him in his arms. His own senses were reeling.

“Promise—” pleaded the half-unconscious man.

“I promise,” answered Sturgis, after an instant’s hesitation.

It struck a chill to his heart to see his friend dying in the prime of youth, strength and happiness.

Suddenly a thought flashed upon him.

“Brace up, old fellow. All is not yet over. The speaking-tube leads to fresh air. Here, put your lips to it, and breathe through your mouth.’

The artist heard the words and made an effort to obey these directions. With Sturgis’s assistance he managed to place his lips to the mouth-piece of the speaking-tube. A few whiffs of comparatively fresh air sent the sluggish blood coursing through his veins, and gave him a new hold on life. With renewed vigor came the animal instinct to fight to the last for existence.

As the shadows of death which had been clos-

ing in upon him receded, he became conscious of Sturgis's voice beating upon his ears in broken and scarcely audible tones.

"It is—the last chance—Stick—to the tube—When he comes—surprise him—your revolver—shoot—before—"

The reporter was clinging unsteadily to his friend's shoulder. Sprague suddenly realized that Sturgis in his turn was succumbing to the effects of the gas. He sprang back in time to catch the staggering man in his arms.

"Selfish brute that I am!" he exclaimed. "Here; it is your turn to breathe!" And he pushed the reporter toward the tube.

"No, no," said Sturgis, struggling faintly; "it cannot be both—and you—have—everything—to live for."

But the artist was now the stronger, and he succeeded in forcing his friend to inhale enough fresh air to restore his departing consciousness.

At length Sturgis, with returning strength, was about to renew the generous struggle with Sprague, when suddenly the place was ablaze with the glare of an electric light.

"He wants to see if his work is done," whispered Sturgis to his companion.

Then, observing that Sprague was again on the verge of asphyxiation, he continued hurriedly:

"Fill your lungs with air, quick!—quick, I tell you. Now drop and feign death. Do as I do."

Suiting the action to the word, Sturgis threw himself upon the stone floor, face downward, and lay motionless, his right hand grasping a revolver concealed beneath his body. Sprague, after a short breathing spell at the tube, followed his companion's example.

After a short interval there came a metallic click, which Sturgis recognized as the sound made by the opening of the slide in the panel of the door at the head of the stairs.

A moment—which seemed an eternity of suspense—followed, during which the prisoners felt, without being able to see, the cold gleam of the steely eyes of Murdock at the grating.

Would he enter? Would he suspect the ruse? Would the two men retain their grasp of consciousness and their strength long enough to make a last fight for life?

These thoughts crowded upon the reporter's brain as he lay simulating death and making a desperate effort to control his reeling senses.

If Murdock were coming he would have to shut off the gas and to ventilate the room. What was he waiting for?

"Come in!"

The words were Murdock's as he turned away from the grating and closed the sliding panel.

"An interruption which probably means death to us," whispered Sturgis to his companion; "take another breath of fresh air, old fellow; we must hold out a little longer."

Sprague, however, lay motionless and unresponsive. The reporter shook him violently and turned him over upon his back. The artist's body was limp and inert; his eyes half closed; his face livid.

The reporter himself felt sick and faint. But, with a mighty effort, he succeeded in raising his friend in his arms, and dragging him toward the speaking-tube. There, of a sudden, his strength failed him. His head swam; his muscles relaxed; he felt Sprague's limp form slip from his grasp, tottered, reeled, threw his arms wildly about him for support, and fell, as the last elusive ray of consciousness was slipping away from him.

CHAPTER XXII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

AFTER Sprague had left her, Agnes, shaken by the conflicting emotions of the day, had gone to her room to rest and to prepare for the interview which she meant to have with her father on the subject of her lover and of Chatham.

Having received word that Murdock would remain in his study during the rest of the afternoon, she had taken time to reflect upon what she meant to say, and how she meant to say it. Her visit was not prompted by the desire of a daughter to confide the great happiness of her life to the loving sympathy of an affectionate parent; but Agnes was punctilious in the performance of what she considered to be her duties, great and small, and she counted it among those duties to obtain, or at any rate to seek, the paternal sanction of her choice of a husband.

Her knock at the door of Murdock's study was answered in the chemist's quiet voice :

"Come in."

As she opened the door, Murdock advanced to meet her. He seemed to come from the direction of the extension.

Miss Murdock sniffed the air.

"Isn't there a leak of gas?" she inquired.

"Yes," replied Murdock; "I have just stopped a leak in the laboratory. Won't you take a chair, Agnes?"

She felt his calm searching glance upon her; and, in spite of her preparation, she grew embarrassed, as was her wont, in her father's presence.

"Did Mr. Chatham wait to see you this afternoon?" she asked, after a momentary silence.

Murdock observed her narrowly.

"Yes; Chatham has been here to-day. I did not know that you had seen him."

"I could not help seeing him; for he forced his way into the parlor, in spite of all the servants could do to prevent him."

An almost imperceptible furrow appeared between the chemist's eyes.

"Has he been annoying you with his attentions?"

The words were spoken in Murdock's usual

tones; but Agnes saw something in her father's eyes and in the firm lines of his mouth which sent a cold shiver down her spine, and caused her pity to go out to the unfortunate young man who had offended her.

"Perhaps he is more to be pitied than blamed," she suggested gently. "My interview with him was certainly not pleasant; but I bear him no malice."

"Tell me about it," said Murdock slowly.

Agnes gave her version of the visit, in which, instinctively, she softened, as much as possible, the passion and brutality displayed by the accountant.

Murdock listened in silence until she had quite finished. Then Agnes noticed that his right hand was clenched upon the arm of his chair with a force which caused the muscles to stand out in hard knots. She looked up into his face in sudden surprise.

His features gave no indication of what his feelings might be; and his voice, as usual, was steady and deliberate.

"I am sorry all this should have happened, Agnes. As I told you yesterday, I hoped to save you from this man's importunities. It can-

not be helped now. But I think I made it clear to the gentleman that his attentions are as distasteful to me as they are to you. As he seems to have told you, he has been obliged to leave the country—I understand that he has done something or other which makes it safer for him to undertake a long journey. At any rate, we are well rid of him for some time to come, and I think you need have no fear of further molestation."

"What did he mean by saying that he had had encouragement from you?" asked the young girl.

"I am sure I do not know. That was of course a lie out of whole cloth. He came to me with letters of recommendation from good friends of mine, and I therefore occasionally invited him to the house; but that is all the encouragement he ever got from me. We live in the United States and at the close of the nineteenth century. The selection of a husband is no longer performed by a stern parent, but is left entirely to the young girl herself. That is certainly my way of looking at the matter. When you find the man of your choice, my only function will be to give my advice, if you seek it, and my best assistance in any event."

The turn of the conversation thus suddenly brought to the surface the topic which occupied the young girl's mind, to the exclusion of all others; and which, for that very reason, had been kept severely in the background up to that point.

"That reminds me," said Agnes consciously, as a charming flush suffused her beautiful face, "that I have not yet broached the principal object of this interview——"

Murdock observed her closely and waited for her to proceed. But Agnes was once more laboring under a strange embarrassment and could not find words in which to frame the confidence she was so reluctant to offer.

Perhaps the chemist divined something of the nature of what she was struggling to find expression for. At any rate, he noticed her embarrassment and endeavored to come to her assistance with a few encouraging words, spoken with unusual gentleness. Agnes, engrossed with her own thoughts, did not notice it; but there was in his manner as near an approach to tender wistfulness as his nature was capable of.

At last the young girl seemed to gather courage, and she was about to speak, when there was a knock upon the door.

"Plaze, sur; there do be two gintlemin in the hall."

"Who are they, Mary?"

"Shure, thin, sir, I dunno, barrin' wan uv 'em do be a polacemun."

"Did they ask to see me?"

"They did not, sur; shure they asked if Mr. Chapman was in."

"Mr. Chatham?"

"Yis, sur. And I told 'em he wuz here this afthernoon, and I wud see wuz he here now, fur I aint seen him go yit."

"Well, Mary, you see he has gone, since he is no longer here," said Murdock quietly. "Take the gentlemen into the parlor, and tell them I shall be with them in a minute."

"All right, sur."

After the maid had left the room, the chemist rose from his chair and walked toward the door leading to the library.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes, Agnes, I shall see what these men want. Wait for me here, if you will. I shall be back directly."

So saying, he noiselessly opened the folding doors and passed into the library, closing the doors carefully behind him.

Freed from the presence of her father, Agnes almost instantly regained her composure. She had not, however, had much time to collect her thoughts, when she was suddenly startled by a loud shrill whistle, which brought her to her feet in alarm.

It is a well-known fact that there is, in the ring of a door bell, a complex range of expression, which differentiates to an observant ear the characteristics of the ringer. No one is likely to mistake the postman's ring for that of the beggar ; and no young girl is liable to confound her father's ring with that of her lover ; but, to a careful observer, the gradations of quality, of intensity, of duration, in a ringing door bell, are almost as great as in the voices of the ringers themselves. Perhaps the range of expression in the whistle of a speaking-tube is less extended ; but in the whistle which reached Agnes Murdock's ears there was something that struck a chill of terror to her heart, like a wild despairing cry of anguish, and which caused her to spring without hesitation to the tube, the mouth-piece of which protruded from the wall of Murdock's study.

" Well ? "

She asked the question in anxious tones, as if realizing that life and death were in the balance. Then she placed her ear to the mouthpiece.

At first, she could not make out the words spoken by her invisible interlocutor. Then, gradually, they fell upon her ear with terrible distinctness; and she stood spellbound, as in a horrible nightmare, with sudden terror in her staring eyes, and with the fearful sense of impotence in her trembling limbs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SPEAKING-TUBE.

NATURE has implanted in every one of its living creatures, from the top to the bottom of the scale, the strongest of all instincts—that of self-preservation. As Sturgis fell forward and clutched wildly at the air, his hands struck the stone wall of the square chamber. No conscious impression was made upon his brain by the contact ; but, automatically, his fingers tightened as they slipped over the smooth surface. His right hand struck an obstacle and closed upon it, in the convulsive grip of a dying man. Then a sudden gleam of consciousness swept across his sluggish brain.

It was the speaking-tube !

He clung to it with the remnant of his strength and eagerly placed his lips to the mouthpiece. For a few minutes he drank in with avidity the revivifying draughts of air which gradually brought him back from the brink of death.

With returning consciousness, the thought of

his dying friend recurred to him in all its vividness. He tried to go to his assistance ; but he was sick and faint, and his limbs were powerless to respond to his will. Then, at last, he was seized with utter despair and gave up the struggle.

He had sunk dejectedly upon the chair when a faint and indistinct murmur, as of distant voices, beat upon his ears, whose natural acuity seemed extraordinarily increased by the long nervous tension under which he had been. The ruling passion is strong in death ; without knowing just why he did so, Sturgis found himself again at the speaking-tube, endeavoring to hear the conversation, the sound of which evidently came from Murdock's office.

He could barely distinguish a word here and there ; but he recognized the timbre of one of the voices. It was the chemist's, and his interlocutor was a woman—perhaps his daughter. If only he could reach Agnes Murdock with some word or signal.

In suspense, he held his ear to the mouthpiece, occasionally taking a breath of fresh air to renew his strength.

Should he take the chances and shout in the

hope of catching the young girl's attention? If he whistled, Murdock would answer himself, and the last chance would be lost. But would she hear a shout? And, if she did, would not her father prevent her from rendering any assistance? Yet what other chance was there? Poor Sprague was dying; perhaps already dead. There was no time to lose.

He stood for a while irresolute, and had just made up his mind to risk all on a bold move, when suddenly Murdock's voice became more distinct, as if he were passing near the mouth-piece of the speaking-tube at the other end.

"I shall be back directly."

He was going, then. Agnes, if it were she, would remain alone for at least an instant; and in that instant lay possible salvation.

The reporter strained every nerve to catch some other word. None came. But presently he heard a door close. Murdock had left the room. Now or never was the chance to act. With all his might he blew repeatedly into the tube.

"Well?"

The question came in the sweet tones of a woman's voice.

"Mr. Sprague is in great danger. You alone can save his life, if you do at once as I say. Go to the door of the extension; press upward on the lower hinge; then turn the knob! Quick, before your father returns!"

Sturgis evoked the image of Murdock performing these operations before opening the door of the extension; and, with retrospective intuition, divined their purpose.

There was no answer. Sturgis waited for none. In a bound he was at his friend's side and was struggling to drag him toward the foot of the stairs. As he reached this point, the door opened and revealed Agnes Murdock, pale and frightened, on the landing at the top.

The first rush of gas caused her to start back; but in another instant she had caught sight of her lover's inanimate form and had rushed to his assistance.

Slowly and laboriously Sturgis and his fair assistant dragged the unconscious man up the stairs. With every step the task became more difficult, as the effect of the gas told upon the strength of the toilers. It began to look as if it would be impossible to reach the top.

Suddenly a shadow fell across the threshold of

the open door. Sturgis looked up in quick apprehension.

It was Murdock.

He stood critically observing the scene, with all outward appearance of calmness.

Agnes had not seen him. She was making desperate efforts to raise Sprague's limp form ; but felt herself succumbing to the effects of the gas.

"My darling! my poor darling!" she exclaimed, and suddenly she staggered and lurched forward.

Sturgis made an instinctive effort to support her ; but before he could reach her Murdock was at her side and had her in his arms. He bore her gently up the stairs and into his study. Then, for an instant, he seemed to hesitate. The reporter expected to see him close the door. Instinctively his hand reached back to his hip pocket for his revolver. But, in another moment, Murdock had returned to where he stood.

"Come!" he said.

At the same time he lifted the artist in his arms and carried him up the stairs. Sturgis followed unsteadily and reached the study, only to fall exhausted into a chair.

Having deposited his burden upon the floor, Murdock closed the door of the death chamber; turned a valve which was near his desk; opened the windows wide, and revolved a crank which projected from the wall near the door of the extension.

"He is shutting off the gas and opening the steel shutters of the skylight," thought Sturgis.

Then the chemist produced a flask and poured out a small quantity of brandy, which he forced his daughter to swallow.

As soon as she was sufficiently revived, she rushed to the side of her lover, whose head she gently raised to her lap. Murdock's eyes were fastened upon her. She met his calm questioning gaze.

"Yes, I love him," she said simply.

Then this strange man, without another word, gently pushed his daughter to one side, and, throwing off his coat, stooped over the prostrate form of the man whose life he had tried to take, and industriously worked over him, in an attempt to restore the failing respiration.

Slowly and steadily he worked for what seemed an eternity to the anxious girl. At length he rose, calm and collected as usual, and drew on his coat again.

"He is out of danger now," he said; "you can do the rest yourself."

And he handed his daughter the brandy flask.

A faint tinge of color had returned to the artist's face; his breast heaved gently in an irregular respiration.

Sturgis, still unable to stir from the chair in which he had fallen, was vaguely conscious of Murdock's movements. He saw the chemist open the safe which stood near his table and take from it numerous bundles of bank-notes, which he carefully packed into a valise; he saw him take from the same safe a few richly bound note-books, which he proceeded to do up in a neat bundle, securely tied and sealed.

This done, the chemist put on his hat and coat, and was preparing to pass out into the hallway, when a knock sounded upon the door.

Murdock opened slightly—enough to show himself, without revealing the presence of the other occupants of the room.

It was one of the housemaids.

"Plaze, sur," said the girl, in a frightened voice, "the polacemun says he can't wait no longer; he must see yer right away."

"Are they in the parlor?"

"Only the polacemun, sur ; the other man said he would wait outside."

Murdock took a minute for reflection.

"Wait in the hall until I call you," he said, at last. "If the policeman becomes impatient, tell him I shall not be long ; that I am engaged on most important business."

No sooner had the girl gone than Murdock, seizing the valise and the package, opened the door of the extension. His eyes rested for a while upon his daughter, who, still absorbed in the tender care of her inanimate lover, was oblivious of all else. There was in them an unusual expression,—almost a tender light ; but the impassive face was otherwise emotionless.

The chemist seemed to hesitate for a brief instant whether to speak ; then, passing out into the extension, he softly closed the door behind him.

Sturgis alone, weak and powerless, had seen him go.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHECKMATE!

THE two detectives, after leaving Sprague and Sturgis in the cellar of the Manhattan Chemical Company, proceeded to search the premises from basement to roof. Then, somewhat discomfited, they returned to the cellar, and were surprised to find that the reporter and his friend had disappeared.

After questioning the man whom they had left on watch on the outside, and ascertaining that neither Sprague nor Sturgis had yet left the house, the detectives called loudly to the missing men, and receiving no reply, at last became alarmed, and sent word of the mysterious disappearance to headquarters. The chief's answer came at once:

"Remain on watch where you are. We shall investigate from the other side."

One of the detectives thereupon went up to the roof of the building, whence he could keep

watch upon the back yards, while his companion remained in the front hall.

They had been waiting thus for some time, when the latter thought he heard footsteps in the direction of the private office. He was on the alert in an instant.

The door was cautiously opened and a man stepped out into the hallway. He carried a valise and a package. He blinked like a man coming suddenly from the darkness into the daylight.

"Who are you?" asked the detective brusquely.

The man looked in the direction of the voice; and, as his eyes became accustomed to the light, returned the detective's surprised stare with a calm and searching look.

"Checkmate!" he murmured quietly to himself at last.

Then, without seeming haste, he passed back into the private office, before the astonished detective could make any attempt to stop him.

Recovering himself quickly, the detective followed the sounds of the retreating footsteps to the cellar stairs. Then, fearful of an ambush, he fired his revolver as a signal to his companion on

the roof; and, after striking a match, he cautiously descended, reaching the cellar just in time to see Murdock disappear into the underground passage.

He rushed to the spot; and, unable to find the door, he pounded with all his might upon the shelves, causing the bottles to dance and rattle.

"Come, now," he shouted, "the game's up! You may as well be reasonable. You can't possibly escape, for you're surrounded."

No answer came from within.

The man tried his powerful strength upon the door without any perceptible effect.

When the second detective arrived upon the scene, he found the first one removing the bottles from the shelves by the light of a match held in his left hand.

"Get a light and an axe, Jim. There's a secret door here which we'll have to break in; I can't find any way of opening it."

A few minutes later, the detectives, after dealing upon the shelves some telling blows with an axe, again called upon Murdock to surrender.

Receiving no answer to their summons, the men stood irresolute for a few seconds. Then,

with grim determination, they attacked the door ; raining the blows upon it fast and furiously, and filling the air with a shower of splinters.

At length a final stroke sent the weakened hinges from their fastenings, and the men rushed through the underground passage into the murderer's laboratory.

A hasty, startled glance told them that Murdock was not there.

They started for the stairs and were met by a policeman who was just entering from Murdock's office.

"Have you got him?" asked the detectives in chorus.

"No," replied the policeman surprised ; "Mr. Sturgis says he went down here about twenty minutes ago."

"We chased him in from the other end not ten minutes ago."

The policeman hurried down the stairs.

Murdock's valise and package stood conspicuous upon the long pine box. But of Murdock there was no sign.

"Gone!" exclaimed one of the detectives, deeply mortified at the thought that his quarry had slipped through his fingers. "Gone!"

How? Where? He cannot have escaped. He cannot—— What is it, Mr. Sturgis?"

He had suddenly caught sight of the reporter, half way up the stairs.

Weak and ill, Sturgis, with blanched face, clung unsteadily, with one hand, to the railing; while, with the other, he pointed toward the lead-lined vat, whose dark viscous contents were bubbling like boiling oil.

A pungent vapor rose in dense clouds from the surface of the liquid. Through it the fascinated gaze of the horrified men vaguely discerned a nameless thing, tossed in weird and grotesque contortions in a seething vortex.

Murdock had escaped the justice of men.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MURDER SYNDICATE.

"SEE here, Sturgis; this won't do. I forbade you to do a stroke of work to-day, or even to leave your bed; and here you are scribbling away just as though nothing had happened. I tell you when a man has had the narrow squeak you have, there has been a tremendous strain upon his heart, and it is positively dangerous——"

"Don't scold, old man; I have never in my life been better than I feel to-day. And besides, this work could not be postponed——"

"Oh, pshaw! That is what nine out of every ten patients say to their physician. They are modestly convinced that the world must needs come to a standstill if they cannot accomplish their tiny mite of work. What do you suppose the world would have done had you and Sprague remained in Murdock's death chamber yesterday? I'll tell you. The *Tempest* would have printed

two eulogistic obituary notices; and then the world would have hobbled on, just as though the greatest detective of the age and the modern Raphael had not been snuffed out of existence."

Doctor Thurston, who had assumed his frown of professional severity, proceeded to feel the reporter's pulse.

"Well, you are in luck; better than you deserve. Almost any other man would have been laid up for a week by the experience you have been through. And here you have the face to recover without the assistance of the medical profession, and in spite of your insolent disregard of my express orders to leave work alone for the present. Now, there is Sprague——"

"Ah, what of Sprague?" asked the reporter, anxiously.

"Sprague has had a close call. But he is safe now. If tender and intelligent nursing count for anything, he will probably be up in a day or two."

"Miss Murdock?——"

"Yes. She has a professional nurse to help her; but she has insisted on taking charge of the case herself. And an excellent nurse she is, too, and a charming girl into the bargain,—and what is more, a noble woman."

"Does she know of her father's death?"

"I broke the news to her as gently as possible. She took it much more calmly than I supposed she would. There evidently was but little sympathy between her and her father."

"On her side, at any rate."

"Yes. Her first act on learning of her father's crimes was to send for a lawyer. She refuses to touch a cent of his money, and has instructed her attorney to make such restitutions as may be possible and to turn over the rest to charitable institutions. This leaves her almost penniless; for the property she held in her own right from her mother's estate amounts to very little. Fortunately, Sprague is rich enough for both. What are you doing there, if I may ask?"

Doctor Thurston pointed to a bundle which lay upon the table.

"That is Murdock's autobiography—a legacy to me. The package was found near his valise in the death chamber. He had addressed it to me at the last minute."

"Did it help you in your account of the Knickerbocker bank case for the *Tempest*?"

"A little; but naturally, Murdock's account of that crime was not complete. The entire journal,

however, is of absorbing interest. It is a pity that it cannot be published."

"Why cannot it be published?"

"It would be dangerous to the welfare of society. Murdock was an extraordinary genius in his line; there is marvelous originality and ingenuity in his work. His crimes, numbered by the hundred, were all of capital importance in their results; all deep-laid and skilfully executed. It is hardly likely that such another consummate artist in crime will exist once a century. To publish the details of his schemes would be to put a formidable weapon in the hands of the vulgar herd of ordinary criminals, who lack the imagination of this brilliant villain.

"I tell you, Thurston," continued Sturgis, with what seemed very like enthusiastic conviction, "this man was the originator of almost every unsolved mystery which has nonplussed the police during the last fifteen years. He had his agents in every important center throughout the country; agents working under potent incentives, and yet working in the dark, for few of them have ever known who held the mysterious power which directed their every move. Murder has been done wholesale: and so quietly and mys-

teriously has the work been accomplished, that, in all but this last case, the detectives have found no clue whatever which might lead to an explanation of the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of wealthy men, whose bodies, shipped to the Manhattan Chemical Company by Murdock's agents, were quietly and systematically made away with in the chemist's laboratory."

"He was the fiend incarnate!" exclaimed the physician.

"Well," said Sturgis, after a moment of thoughtful silence, "at any rate, he was not wantonly cruel. He was heartless; he was pitiless; but his cruelty was always a means to an end, however selfish and illegitimate that end might be. His cruelty is that, in a measure, of every human being destroying life that he may live and trampling upon his fellow men that he may be comfortable. Between Murdock and the rest of us there was a difference of degree, certainly, but was there a difference of kind?"

"There is one thing which I cannot yet understand," said Thurston, "and that is, why Murdock should have pushed his audacity to the point of defying you to ferret out the mystery of this crime, when he might perhaps have avoided all risk of detection by holding his tongue."

"No man is perfect," answered Sturgis, sentimentously, "not even an accomplished villain like Murdock, fortunately for the rest of mankind. Every human being has his weak points. Murdock had two:—his vanity and his love for his daughter. They were the only traits which connected him with the human family. To them he owes his undoing."

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